

**The Residents of the British East India Company at Indian  
royal courts, c. 1798-1818**

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*This dissertation is submitted for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy  
at the University of Cambridge*

July 2017

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Generations of historians have looked to Bengal, Bombay, and Madras to detect the emergence of the legal and administrative mechanisms that would underpin Britain's nineteenth-century empire. Yet this focus on 'British' India overshadows the very different history of nearly half the Indian subcontinent, which was still ruled by nominally independent monarchs. This dissertation traces the increasingly asymmetrical relationships between the East India Company and neighbouring Indian kingdoms during a period of intensive British imperial expansion, from 1798 to 1818. In so doing, it sheds fresh light on the contested process through which the Company consolidated its political predominance over rival Indian powers, setting a precedent for indirect rule that would inform British policy in Southeast Asia and Africa for years to come.

The relationship between the Company and Indian governments was mediated through the figure of the Resident, the Company's political representative at Indian courts, and the Residents therefore lie at the heart of this dissertation. Given their geographical distance from British administrative centres and their immersion in Indian political culture, the Residents' experiences can be used to chart the growing pains of an expanding, modernizing empire, and to elucidate the dynamics of cross-cultural interaction and exchange. Based on the letters and papers of the dozen Residents stationed at major Indian courts, this dissertation shows how practical and ideological divisions within the Company regarding the appropriate forms of imperial influence were exacerbated by mutual suspicions resulting from geographical distance and the blurring of personal and public interests in the diplomatic line. This process was further complicated and constrained by the Residents' reliance on the social and cultural capital of Indian elites and administrators with interests of their own.

The Company's consolidation of political influence at Indian courts was fraught with problems, and the five thematic chapters reflect recurring points of conflict which thread their way through these formative years. These include: the fragility of information networks and the proliferation of rumours; questions about the use of force and the applicability of the law of nations outside Europe; controversies surrounding political pageantry and conspicuous consumption; ambivalent relationships between Residents and their Indian state secretaries; and the Residents' embroilment in royal family feuds. Ultimately, this dissertation concludes that the imposition of imperial authority at Indian courts was far from smooth, consisting instead of a messy and protracted series of practical experiments based on many competing visions of the ideal forms of influence to be employed in India.

*Declaration*

This dissertation is the result of my own work and includes nothing which is the outcome of work done in collaboration except as declared in the Preface or specified in the text.

Signed: CALLIE WILKINSON

Date: 06/07/2017

It is not substantially the same as any that I have submitted, or, is being concurrently submitted for a degree or diploma or other qualification at the University of Cambridge or any other University or similar institution except as declared in the Preface and specified in the text. I further state that no substantial part of my dissertation has already been submitted, or, is being currently submitted for any such degree, diploma or other qualification at the University of Cambridge or any other University or similar institution except as declared in the Preface and specified in the text.

Signed: CALLIE WILKINSON

Date: 06/07/2017

*Statement of Length*

This dissertation does not exceed the prescribed word limit of 80,000 set by the Degree Committee of the History Faculty.

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Date: 06/07/2017

## Acknowledgements

Like the Residents I write about in this dissertation, I too have spent the last four years with an ocean separating me from my family and dearest friends. The resemblance, however, ends there. Whereas the Residents' letters are full of frustrations and bitter complaints, my time at Cambridge has been very happy, largely because of the people I was fortunate enough to be surrounded by. My chief intellectual debt is to my supervisor, Dr Renaud Morieux, whose curiosity and enthusiasm are truly infectious. This project has benefited immeasurably from his questions and suggestions, particularly his insistence on the big picture. Warm thanks are also due to Dr Norbert Peabody, who offered advice and encouragement at different stages of the project, and Dr Sujit Sivasundaram, who very kindly included me in his graduate reading group. That reading group has been an important source of ideas and inspiration; special thanks go out to Alix Chartrand, Hatice Yildiz, Steph Mawson, James Wilson, and Tom Simpson, who first made me feel welcome. I would be remiss if I did not also mention Dr Elizabeth Elbourne, whose undergraduate lectures and seminars at McGill University first interested me in British history. She probably has no idea how much her warmth and intellectual generosity meant to me as a student, and I'm happy to take this opportunity to thank her properly.

A few more practical words of acknowledgement are also in order. Research for this dissertation was made possible by funding from the Cambridge Commonwealth Trust and the Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council of Canada, along with travel grants from the Royal Historical Society, the Institute of Historical Research, and the Cambridge Faculty of History Members History Trust Fund. I would also like to express my deepest gratitude to the staff at archives in India and across the UK who put up with my many requests. I'm especially thankful to the archivists at the Allahabad branch of the Uttar Pradesh State Archives, who negotiated the language barrier with patience and grace.

There are a few people who, despite having absolutely no interest in the East India Company, were nevertheless vital to the completion of this dissertation. Jamie saw this project through from first to last, and is doubtless even happier than I am that it is finished (for the time being). He made me laugh when the future seemed bleak, and reminded me that there is a wider world outside of books that is well worth appreciating. My greatest thanks, however, are reserved for my parents, Chris and Mary Anne, who worked hard and sacrificed a great deal so I could end up where I am. They may not always understand what my research is about or why I do it, but that just makes me even more grateful for their unquestioning encouragement and support. This dissertation is dedicated to them.

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## Map of India in 1795



Charles Joppen, *Historical atlas of India* (London: Longmans, Green & Co., 1907).



## Map of India in 1823



Charles Joppen, *Historical atlas of India* (London: Longmans, Green & Co., 1907).



## Residents

Courts	Names	Years in office
Awadh	George F. Cherry	1795-1800
	William Scott	1802-1804
	John Baillie	1807-1816
	Richard Strachey	1817-1819
Delhi	David Ochterlony	1803-1806
	Archibald Seton	1806-1811
	Charles Theophilus Metcalfe	1811-1819
Hyderabad	James Achilles Kirkpatrick	1798-1805
	Thomas Sydenham	1805-1810
	Henry Russell	1810-1820
Poona	William Palmer	1798-1801
	Barry Close	1801-1810
	Mountstuart Elphinstone	1811-1818
Nagpur	H.T. Colebrooke	1798-1801
	Mountstuart Elphinstone	1804-1807
	Richard Jenkins	1807-1828
Sindhia's camp	John Ulrich Collins	1798-1804
	Josiah Webbe	1804
	Richard Jenkins	1804
	Graeme Mercer	1807-1810
	Richard Strachey	1815-1816
	Robert Close	1817-1824
Travancore	Colin Macaulay	1800-1810
	John Munro	1810-1818

Compiled using Oxford Dictionary of National Biography and East India Company directories and registers. Dates are rough approximates, since the date when Residents were officially appointed does not always match when they physically arrived at court (which might be significantly earlier or later). Delhi and Travancore received their first Residents significantly later than the other courts, in 1803 and 1800, respectively.

## Rulers

Courts	Titles	Names	Reign
Awadh	Nawab Vizier (King of Awadh after 1814)	Asaf-ud-Daula	1775-1797
		Vizier Ali Khan	1797-1798
		Saadat Ali Khan II	1798-1814
		Ghazi-ud-din Haidar Khan	1814-1827
Delhi	Mughal Emperor (King of Delhi after 1803)	Shah Alam II	1759-1806
		Akbar Shah II	1806-1837
Hyderabad	Nizam	Ali Khan	1726-1803
		Sikander Jah	1803-1829
Poona	Peshwa	Baji Rao II	1796-1818
Nagpur	Rajah of Berar	Raghoji II Bhonsla	1788-1816
		Parsoji Bhonsla	1816-1817
		Appah Sahib	1817-1818
Gwalior	Sindhia	Daulat Rao Sindhia	1794-1827
Travancore	Rajah	Avittom Thirunal Balarama Varma	1798-1810
		Gowri Lakshmi Bai, regent	1810-1815
		Rama Varma II	1815-1846

## Governors-General

Years in office	Governor-General
1793-1798	Sir John Shore, first Baron Teignmouth
1798-1805	Richard Wellesley, Marquess Wellesley
1805	Charles Cornwallis, Marquess Cornwallis
1805-1807	Sir George Hilario Barlow
1807-1813	Gilbert Elliot Murray Kynynmound, first Earl Minto
1813-1823	Francis Rawdon Hastings, first Marquess of Hastings

Compiled using Oxford Dictionary of National Biography.

## Glossary

<i>akhbar</i>	News, intelligence, a newspaper; especially the written intelligence of the proceedings of native courts and princes circulated to other courts and princes by their appointed agents.
<i>arzee</i>	Persian petition.
<i>aumil</i>	A collector of revenue; a farmer of revenue invested with chief authority in his district.
<i>bai</i>	A lady of rank, Hindu.
<i>begum</i>	A princess, a mistress, a lady of rank; usually Muslim.
<i>Brahmin</i>	Hindu priestly caste.
<i>dak</i>	Post, post-office, or establishment for the conveyance of letters and of travellers. Relays of men or cattle along the road for these purposes.
<i>darbar</i>	A court, a royal court, an audience or levée.
<i>diwan</i>	In Muslim governments, the head financial minister; in Maratha polities, the chief minister.
<i>fakir</i>	Religious ascetic or mendicant monk.
<i>harkara</i>	Runner, messenger, intelligence agent.
<i>insha</i>	Creating, producing, composing; writing, composition; style, elegance of style, especially in letter-writing; the <i>belles lettres</i> .
<i>jagir</i>	A tenure common under the Mughals, in which the public revenues of a given tract of land were made over to a servant of the state, together with the powers requisite to enable him to collect and appropriate such revenue, and administer the general government of the district.
<i>khilat</i>	A dress of honour; any article of costume presented by the ruling or superior authority to an inferior as a mark of distinction.
<i>mahal</i>	A place, a house, an apartment, a seraglio.
<i>mir</i>	Title given before a name usually signifying that the holder is a lineal descent of the prophet Mohammed.
<i>Mirza</i>	Prince or gentleman.
<i>munshi</i>	A writer, scribe or secretary.
<i>musnud</i>	Throne, usually low arrangement of cushions and bolsters.
<i>nautch</i>	A kind of dance performed by women; also any kind of stage entertainment.
<i>nazr</i>	A ceremonial present, an offering from an inferior to a superior.

<i>paan</i>	The aromatic leaf of the betel, rolled round a few small pieces of the astringent Areka nut with a little caustic lime, a few heads of spice, and sometimes a little catechu, for the purpose of being chewed, acting as a carminative and antacid tonic. It is presented to guests and visitors, and sometimes sent to friends and relations, especially at family festivals, enclosed in gold or silver paper leaf.
<i>palankin</i>	Covered litter usually for one passenger carried by means of poles resting on the shoulders of several men.
<i>peshkash</i>	Tax, tribute; a fine or present to the ruling power on receiving an appointment or assignment of revenue, or on a renewal of a grant or the like.
<i>Pindaris</i>	Bands of mounted plunderers.
<i>pardah</i>	A veil, a screen, a curtain, especially one which excludes the women of a family from the gaze of men.
<i>sirdar</i>	Leader, a commander, a chief or lord.
<i>vakil</i>	Ambassador or representative.
<i>zamindar</i>	Landholder or local ruler.
<i>zenana</i>	The women's apartments of a house in which the women of the family are secluded. Also used for the women of the family.

Glossary compiled using Henry Yule, *Hobson-Jobson: A glossary of colloquial Anglo-Indian words and phrases*, new edn., ed. William Crooke (London, 1903) and H. H. Wilson, *A glossary of judicial and revenue terms, and of useful words occurring in official documents relating to the administration of the government of British India* (London, 1855).

## Abbreviations

BC	Board's Collections, OIOC
BL	British Library, London
Bodl. Oxf.	Bodleian Library, Oxford
CSSAAME	<i>Comparative Studies of South Asia, Africa, and the Middle East</i>
CSSH	<i>Comparative Studies in Society and History</i>
HJ	<i>The Historical Journal</i>
HM	Home Miscellaneous Series, OIOC
IESHR	<i>Indian Economic &amp; Social History Review</i>
JBS	<i>Journal of British Studies</i>
MAS	<i>Modern Asian Studies</i>
Nagpur records	H.N. Sinha (ed.), <i>Selections from the Nagpur Residency records</i> , 8 vols. (Nagpur, 1950).
NAI	National Archives of India, New Delhi
NLS	National Library of Scotland, Edinburgh
NRAS	National Register of Archives for Scotland
NRS	National Records of Scotland, Edinburgh
OIOC	Oriental and India Office Collections, BL
P & P	<i>Past &amp; Present</i>
Poona records	G.S. Sardesai (ed.), <i>English records of Maratha history Poona Residency correspondence</i> , 14 vols. (Bombay, 1940).
Russell Papers	Papers of the Russell Family of Swallowfield, Berkshire, Bodl. Oxf.
UPSAA	Uttar Pradesh State Archives, Allahabad Branch
Wellesley despatches	Robert Montgomery Martin (ed.), <i>The despatches, minutes, and correspondence of the Marquess Wellesley, K.G., during his administration in India</i> , 5 vols., (Cambridge, 2011).

## Note on transliteration

To avoid anachronism, I have used historic place names (e.g. Poona rather than Pune, Calcutta rather than Kolkata). For the sake of consistency, however, I have used modern transliterations of Indian personal names common in existing scholarship, rather than the wide variety of phonetic spellings used by contemporary British officials. Where the indigenous form is uncertain, I have used British spellings. All quotes retain the original spelling. Indian words are printed in italics, except the terms 'munshi' and 'zenana', which are used so frequently as to render the italics disruptive.



## Introduction

In conventional accounts of Britain's empire overseas, one event persistently looms large: when, on 20 October 1764, the forces of the East India Company and the combined armies of Bengal, Awadh, and the Mughal Emperor clashed at Buxar in north-eastern India. The story that follows is a familiar one. The Company's decisive victory made them masters of Bengal, after several years of ruling through a puppet nawab following the Battle of Plassey in 1757. The legacy of Buxar was confirmed when in 1765 the Company accepted the *diwani*, making them the undisputed governors of what was then one of the richest provinces in Mughal India. The Company's assumption of direct territorial control in Bengal is generally considered one of the founding moments of the so-called Second Empire.<sup>1</sup> As a result, generations of historians have looked to Bengal, 'the British bridgehead', to trace the development of the ideologies and legal and administrative mechanisms that would underpin Britain's nineteenth-century empire.<sup>2</sup> While historians like David Armitage, P.J. Marshall, and Philip J. Stern have suggested the fruitfulness of situating empire in the east within a longer time-span encompassing conquest in Ireland and colonialism in the Atlantic world, events in Bengal nevertheless continue to be understood as a point of rupture.<sup>3</sup> For the first time, Britons were governing over an extensive non-European, non-Christian population, and ever since historians have been enticed by the question of how they sought to justify and carry out this unprecedented 'domination of strangers'.<sup>4</sup>

Yet the Nawab of Bengal was not the only Indian ruler to rally his forces on that long-ago October day. For the Mughal Emperor and the Nawab Vizier of Awadh, the Company's victory at Buxar certainly heralded the Company's growing political and military ascendancy in the subcontinent, but neither rescinded their political autonomy and both remained at least nominally independent until the 1850s. Events in Awadh and the Mughal heartlands around Delhi therefore followed a rather different trajectory than that which historians have documented for Bengal. Meanwhile, for the Marathas gathering force in the

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<sup>1</sup> Vincent T. Harlow, *The founding of the Second British Empire 1763-1793*, 2 vols. (London, 1952-1964), p. 3; P.J. Marshall, 'The First British Empire', in *The Oxford history of the British empire*, ed. Robin W. Winks (Oxford, 1999), vol. V, p. 51; C.A. Bayly, 'The Second British Empire', in *The Oxford history of the British empire*, ed. Robin W. Winks (Oxford, 1999), vol. V, p. 60-62.

<sup>2</sup> P.J. Marshall, *Bengal: The British bridgehead – Eastern India 1740-1828* (Cambridge, 1988), p. 70-92; Robert Travers, *Ideology and empire in eighteenth-century India: The British in Bengal* (Cambridge, 2007), p. 31-66; Jon E. Wilson, *The domination of strangers: Modern governance in eastern India, 1780-1835* (Basingstoke, 2008), p. 2.

<sup>3</sup> David Armitage, *The ideological origins of the British Empire* (Cambridge, 2004), p. 3; P. J. Marshall, *The making and unmaking of empires: Britain, India, and America c. 1750-1783* (Oxford, 2005), p. 379; Philip J. Stern, 'British Asia and British Atlantic: Comparisons and connections', *The William and Mary Quarterly*, 63:4 (2006): 693-712.

<sup>4</sup> Wilson, *The domination of strangers*, p. 182.

plains of central India, the story of their confrontation with the Company had just begun. Their decisive defeat would come only in 1818, and arguably not even then; while the Peshwa of Poona was forced into exile, his lands absorbed by the Company, the territories around Nagpur and Gwalior would continue to be administered by the Sindhia and Bhonsla dynasties for years to come. Further south, the Mughal successor state of Hyderabad and the Hindu kingdom of Travancore would remain independent until the mid-twentieth century. The focus on Bengal and 'British' India thus overshadows the very different history of nearly half the Indian subcontinent. These kingdoms would continue to be governed by Indians, but would gradually become bound to the Company by unequal alliances whereby their freedom of action on the Indian stage was increasingly circumscribed. Their relationship with the Company was mediated, not through judges or revenue officers, but through the figure of the Resident, the Company's political representative who lived in a great house, hunted tigers with the king, and paraded through city streets on the back of a richly caparisoned elephant. This thesis will examine how the Resident consolidated his position of influence at Indian royal courts, as well as how this process was resisted and negotiated within the Company and by Indians at court.

The development of the Residency system would have a profound impact, both in India and around the globe; whether as a model or a cautionary tale, the Indian Residencies set a precedent for indirect rule that would inform British policy in Southeast Asia and Africa for years to come. Nevertheless, the princely states have been relatively neglected in the historiography of the British empire. Their secondary place reflects a scholarly tendency to privilege histories of direct rule, thereby obscuring the varied repertoires of power available to British agents overseas. While Ronald Robinson and John Gallagher famously popularized the idea of 'informal empires' and 'the imperialism of free trade' in the 1950s, and in so doing brought to the fore British influence in places like Argentina and Brazil, the areas 'coloured red on the map' continue to exert a magnetic force on scholarly attention.<sup>5</sup> Ann Stoler and Lauren Benton have recently issued a call to redress this imbalance, suggesting that by focusing on clearly bounded and defined colonial territories historians have downplayed political and territorial ambiguity as defining features of imperial intervention in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries.<sup>6</sup> Building upon the theories of Giorgio Agamben, they argue that one of the dominant characteristics of imperialism is its production of, and

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<sup>5</sup> John Gallagher and Ronald Robinson, 'The imperialism of free trade', *The Economic History Review*, 6:1 (1953): 1-15.

<sup>6</sup> Ann Laura Stoler, 'On degrees of imperial sovereignty', *Public Culture*, 18:1 (2006): 125-146; Lauren Benton, *A search for sovereignty: Law and geography in European empires, 1400-1900* (Cambridge, 2009), p. 2.

dependence upon, exceptions: the suspension of rights, deviations from rule of law, and political and territorial vagueness.<sup>7</sup> In this light, the Company's ill-defined and asymmetrical relationship with nominally independent Indian kingdoms can be seen as setting the example for the kind of informal influence so critical to Britain's position as the dominant world power of the nineteenth century.

Some historians have recognized the princely states as ideal sites for exploring changing conceptions of state, sovereignty, and empire, but in addressing these questions they have focused almost exclusively on the late nineteenth and early twentieth century.<sup>8</sup> Rather than considering the Residency system in its formative years, historians like Barbara Ramusack and Iain Copland begin their analysis with the British empire in India at its peak, depicting a period when the forms of Indian political culture were already apparently divested of their power and meaning, reduced to empty theatre carefully managed by agents of the Company.<sup>9</sup> The existing scholarship thus seeks, not to understand how this form of imperial influence emerged in the first place, but instead to recover the agency of princes ruling under conditions of apparent thraldom. Though Nicholas Dirks argues that '[t]he death of the old regime came not with the swift slice of the guillotine, but with the slow and blunted chops of colonial contradictions,' this slow and uneven transformation is generally excised from historical accounts.<sup>10</sup> My aim is to delineate the contested and contingent processes which historians have heretofore largely passed over.

Michael Fisher's *Indirect rule in India: Residents and the Residency system 1764-1858*, in addition to being the most significant and widely cited book on the subject, is also the only one to analyse the Residents as a group during this period.<sup>11</sup> In it, Fisher outlines, in impressive detail, the Residency's defining features and modes of operation. At the same time, Fisher's monograph is a straightforwardly political and administrative history of the Residents, one which identifies broad institutional trends rather than scrutinizing individual experiences and accounts. Consequently, Fisher leaves many questions unanswered. By

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<sup>7</sup> For the influence of Agamben in this field, see Yehouda Shenhav, 'Imperialism, exceptionalism and the contemporary world,' in *Agamben and colonialism*, ed. Marcelo Svirsky (Edinburgh, 2012), p. 17-31. For the Indian context specifically, see Nasser Hussain, *The jurisprudence of emergency: Colonialism and the rule of law* (Ann Arbor, MI, 2003), p. 31-32.

<sup>8</sup> Examples include Barbara Ramusack, *The Indian princes and their states* (Cambridge, 2004) and her *The princes of India in the twilight of empire: Dissolution of a patron-client system, 1914-1939* (Columbus, OH, 1978); Iain Copland, *The princes of India in the endgame of empire, 1917-1947* (Cambridge, 1997); Caroline Keen, *Princely India and the British: Political development and the operation of empire* (London, 2012); Waltraud Ernst and Biswamoy Pati (eds.), *India's princely states: People, princes and colonialism* (London, 2007).

<sup>9</sup> The most influential expression of this view is Bernard S. Cohn, 'Representing authority in Victorian India', in *The invention of tradition*, eds. Eric Hobsbawm and Terence Ranger (Cambridge, 1983).

<sup>10</sup> Nicholas Dirks, *The hollow crown: Ethnohistory of an Indian kingdom* (Cambridge, 1987), p. 404.

<sup>11</sup> Michael H. Fisher, *Indirect rule in India: Residents and the Residency system 1764-1858* (Delhi, 1991).

focusing on official negotiation, Fisher's account omits much of the social and cultural content of the Resident's work, thereby neglecting to engage with questions of encounter and exchange. Fisher also draws almost exclusively on official, public correspondence and, in so doing, does not consider the possible dissonance between public statements and personal interests and convictions, eliding the resentments and uncertainties which Residents rarely expressed in public. There are therefore many aspects of the Residency system which remain to be elucidated, facets of the Residents' work and experience which will not only help us better understand the nature of imperial influence as it developed at Indian princely courts, but will also shed light on the nature of empire, governance, and cross-cultural interactions at a formative moment in the history of the British empire.

The remainder of this introduction will provide essential context for understanding the Residents and their work, as well as illustrating how the Residents as a group pose interesting questions connected to broader themes in world history. Section 1 will further elaborate on the Residency system's significance within Britain's expanding empire in India. Section 2 will explain how a focus on the Residents helps foreground important tensions within the growing imperial administration of the early nineteenth century. Section 3 will show how an analysis of the emerging Residency system contributes to a recent efflorescence of scholarship on the problems and possibilities of interstate negotiation outside Europe. Finally, Section 4 will situate the study of the Residents in relation to a broader interest in 'contact zones' and connected histories, showing how this dissertation builds on existing scholarship by placing race, class, gender, and violence at the centre of analysis.

## **1. The origins of the Residency system: A vital chapter in a global story**

The Residency as an institution developed in tandem with the Company's growing political predominance in India, and was crucial to the Company's project of consolidating its hold over the subcontinent. In its early years, the Company's activities were largely restricted to its coastal enclaves, and its primary concern was with trade; accordingly, the earliest treaties concluded with Indian powers in the 1730s pertained to commercial and maritime affairs. By the mid-eighteenth century, the Company enjoyed rights over territory in Bengal, Bombay, and Madras; in these places, they collected taxes, administered justice, and raised armies. To defend their territorial acquisitions, the Company began to conclude agreements with neighbouring states, and posted their first political Residents to the courts of the Mughal successor states of Bengal, Awadh, and Hyderabad in 1764. This was part of a 'ring fence policy' whereby the Company endeavoured to secure its frontiers by using Indian kingdoms as buffers against possible attack. In line with this philosophy the Company began to loan the use of their troops. The most notorious early instance of this was when Warren Hastings

dispatched a subsidiary force to aid Shuja ud-Daula, the Nawab Vizier of Awadh, in his expansionary war against the Rohillas in 1773, a war which would figure prominently in Hastings's subsequent impeachment hearings.<sup>12</sup>

These early alliances with Indian powers were broadly agreements between equals, treaties of friendship wherein Indian kingdoms were recognised as more or less independent political actors. In consequence, the Residents' activities were generally limited to mediation, negotiation, and information-gathering.<sup>13</sup> Some Indian powers even requested Residents for their capitals, which they viewed as a sign of prestige as well as a valuable channel for negotiation with the Company.<sup>14</sup> The Company's representatives were purposely designated as Residents rather than ambassadors, a humble office ranking relatively low in the European diplomatic hierarchy. This title reflected both the Company's status as a chartered corporation, and the determination of the Directors to sidestep questions of precedence and custom and to minimize the cost of ceremonial.<sup>15</sup>

The composition of this political line fluctuated significantly over time. Since military officers were cheaper to employ and more readily available, at first many of the Residents were soldiers who had learned Indian languages in the course of their military service.<sup>16</sup> With the foundation of Fort William and Haileybury Colleges in 1798 and 1806, respectively, the Governor-General-in-Council increasingly preferred to appoint college-educated bureaucrats, instructed in mathematics, natural philosophy, law, history, political economy and the classics, as well as Indian languages, history, and culture.<sup>17</sup> Retrenchment in the 1820s, however, meant that Residents were thereafter more likely to be military officers.<sup>18</sup> Either way, Residents tended to belong to the aristocracy or the landed gentry, often with kinship ties to the Company; they drew on these connections to secure appointments to the Residencies, usually starting out as secretaries or assistants.<sup>19</sup>

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<sup>12</sup> For the contents of this paragraph see Ramusack, *The Indian princes and their states*, p. 65.

<sup>13</sup> Though the Resident at Lucknow briefly experimented with more direct administrative intervention in 1783, this experiment was deemed a failure and seemed to prove the importance of shoring up Indian administrations. Richard Barnett, *North India between empires: Awadh, the Mughals, and the British 1720-1801* (Berkeley, CA, 1980), p. 218-22.

<sup>14</sup> These included Delhi, Lucknow, Poona, Gohud, Berar, Tanjore, and Gwalior, many of whom also sent their own diplomatic agents to the Presidency capitals. Fisher, *Indirect rule in India*, p. 54-55.

<sup>15</sup> Keen, *Princely India and the British*, p. 6; Fisher, *Indirect rule in India*, p. 49. For a discussion of the expense and trouble of ceremonial (albeit for the late nineteenth century), see Dick Kooiman, 'Meeting at the threshold, at the edge of the carpet, or somewhere in between? Questions of ceremonial in princely India', *IESHR*, 40: 3 (2003): 311-333.

<sup>16</sup> For the figure of the 'gentleman-officer-scholar', see Douglas Peers, 'Colonial knowledge and the military in India, 1780-1860', *The Journal of Imperial and Commonwealth History*, 33:2 (2005): 157.

<sup>17</sup> Fisher, *Indirect rule in India*, p. 77-81.

<sup>18</sup> C.A. Bayly, *Imperial meridian: The British empire and the world 1780-1830* (London, 1989), p. 210.

<sup>19</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 88-89.



Over time, the number of Residents posted to local courts, and the scope of their activities, expanded. The year 1798, when Richard Wellesley arrived in the subcontinent to take up his position as Governor-General, is a watershed in the history of the Company's relations with the major Indian kingdoms and therefore marks the starting point of this dissertation. As C. A. Bayly observed, 'the political theory and practice of the Wellesley circle represented the first coherent imperial policy in British Indian history.'<sup>20</sup> Significantly, Wellesley engaged more intensely with the politics of regional powers, making controversial annexations and alliances and eventually leading the Company into a war with the Marathas in 1803. While Wellesley's recall in 1805 constituted something of a renunciation of this process on the part of the Court of Directors and Board of Control in London, Wellesley's legacy had a lasting impact, particularly in the political line which he had overseen so rigorously; the period 1798 to 1818 roughly encompasses a generation of Residents who spent their formative years under Wellesley and were heavily influenced by him.<sup>21</sup> While Wellesley's immediate successors in office repudiated his expansionary aspirations, Governor-General Marquess Hastings (1813-1823) essentially picked up where Wellesley left off. The developments which Wellesley set in motion culminated in 1818 when the East India Company defeated the Marathas and their allies, the Pindaris, in the Third Maratha War, thereby becoming effectively the undisputed political and military power in the subcontinent.

Central to Wellesley's project of political consolidation was the concept of subsidiary alliances; according to these treaties, the Company agreed to defend their Indian allies against attack by stationing Company troops in their dominions, on the condition that their Indian allies financed these troops (whether through subsidies or the lease of productive lands) and consulted with the Company on their foreign policy decisions.<sup>22</sup> Another stipulation of these agreements was the establishment of a political Resident at the courts of the Company's Indian allies. With time, the Resident would increasingly become the exclusive medium for political communication between courts, as the Company sought to isolate and divide the Indian powers. At the point at which this thesis begins, however, the subsidiary alliance system was still in its infancy; its underlying principles and mode of operation were still in the process of being worked out, and certain key Indian powers, notably the Marathas, remained outside its remit. By 1818, the subsidiary alliance system had brought most of central India under the Company's influence, but only after many years of debate within the Company, and resistance on the part of Indians of various backgrounds. It is this contested process that this dissertation seeks to unravel.

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<sup>20</sup> C. A. Bayly, *Indian society and the making of the British empire* (Cambridge, 1988), p. 81.

<sup>21</sup> Fisher, *Indirect rule in India*, p. 57.

<sup>22</sup> Keen, *Princely India and the British*, p. 5.

## 2. Viewing imperial expansion through the eyes of its agents

The Residents considered in this thesis lived through tumultuous times, and their letters and papers, official and unofficial, reveal much about how imperial policies were enacted and experienced on the ground. While not strictly biographical, this project does cover intimate details relating to the careers of a small group of roughly a dozen men, inspired by the ways in which historians of empire have lately used biography as an avenue for understanding the lived experiences of people swept up in the currents of historical change.<sup>23</sup> Much of this literature has analysed biographical fragments concerning convicts, captives, sailors, slaves, traders, and indentured labourers for an alternative view of empire from below.<sup>24</sup> Meanwhile, Margot Finn has argued for the value of a biographical approach as a means of bringing to the fore the family dynamics which often drove imperial officials to seek their fortune overseas in the first place.<sup>25</sup> In a related fashion, Emma Rothschild has used the thick archive of correspondence between members of a Scottish family called the Johnstones to pin down what she terms ‘the inner life of empire’ during the mid-eighteenth century. Beginning with a broad overview of the lives of the sisters and brothers, Rothschild situates these biographies within a wider imperial context, using them to illustrate the effects of changing ideas and geopolitical alignments on the lives of ordinary people. Rothschild’s book demonstrates that Enlightenment ideas and debates had tangible effects on individuals who were not themselves philosophers.<sup>26</sup> Her achievement is to construct a bridge between the world of ideas and the lived experience of the people upon whom the operations of empire depended.

Nor were the Residents just witnesses of empire; rather, they actively fashioned it. As Michael Fisher so aptly put it, the Residents stood ‘at the cutting edge of British expansion.’<sup>27</sup> They were the ‘central yet slender thread that bound the Indian states to the British Government of India,’ men who powerfully shaped the developing relationships between the East India Company and what would come to be called the princely states.<sup>28</sup> Taking a

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<sup>23</sup> Natalie Zemon Davis, *Trickster travels: A sixteenth-century Muslim between worlds* (New York, NY, 2006), p. 11-12; Linda Colley, *The ordeal of Elizabeth Marsh: How a remarkable woman crossed seas and empires to become part of world history* (London, 2007), p. 200.

<sup>24</sup> Clare Anderson, *Subaltern lives: Biographies of colonialism in the Indian Ocean World, 1790-1920* (Cambridge, 2012), p. 12-17; Miles Ogborn, *Global lives: Britain and the world, 1550-1800* (Cambridge, 2008), p. 8-14, though Ogborn’s collection covers a range of lives including those of the governing elite; Linda Colley, *Captives: Britain, empire and the world, 1600-1850* (London, 2002), p. 12-17.

<sup>25</sup> Margot Finn, ‘Anglo-Indian lives in the later eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries’, *Journal for Eighteenth-Century Studies*, 33:1 (2010): 54.

<sup>26</sup> Emma Rothschild, *The inner life of empires: An eighteenth-century history* (Princeton, NJ, 2011), p. 4.

<sup>27</sup> Fisher, *Indirect rule in India*, p. 29.

<sup>28</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 61.

prosopographical approach to the Residency system, one can therefore examine how the attitudes and dispositions of agents on the ground contributed to broader imperial patterns. My interest in individual agency is informed by Frederick Cooper's warning against narrating the history of colonial institutions as though they were 'agentless abstractions'. Such an approach, Cooper argues, obscures the ways in which people confronted the possibilities and constraints of particular colonial situations, and acted accordingly.<sup>29</sup> I have, furthermore, been compelled by Ann Stoler's invitation to attend to 'how power shaped the production of sentiments and vice versa,' to 'dwell in the disquiets, in the antipathies, estrangements, yearnings, and resentments that constrained colonial policies and people's actions'.<sup>30</sup> While in this instance Stoler was particularly concerned with the constitution and consolidation of racial boundaries through attempts to regulate interracial sex and procreation, her proposition seems equally relevant to the study of imperial governance more generally. The policies of the British East India Company were mediated in large part through the activities of individual officials in distant places, and feelings of loss, loneliness, jealousy, or contempt informed how these men perceived India as well as how they behaved there.

On the surface this kind of analysis of the Residents might seem like a 'history of great men', mirroring the triumphal imperial accounts of the nineteenth century which focused on the activities of a select group of elite Europeans. Given that Residents during these years were often men distinguished for their knowledge of Indian languages specifically and their acuity and learning in general, many influential statesmen did indeed make their name in this branch of the Company's service. Mountstuart Elphinstone and Charles Theophilus Metcalfe both worked as Residents before going on to have illustrious imperial careers: Mountstuart Elphinstone would become Governor of the Bombay Presidency, while Charles Theophilus Metcalfe would have an important advisory role in the administration of Governor-General William Bentinck and would later be Governor of Jamaica (1839-1842) and Governor-in-Chief of British North America (1843-1845). These men inspired nineteenth-century hagiographies and continue to feature prominently in modern histories of the British empire in India.<sup>31</sup> To quote the nineteenth-century Company historian John William Kaye, 'there are some men who appear to be born ever to be in the thick of the world's action – ever on the great high road of History, pressing forward, with their loins girt

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<sup>29</sup> Frederick Cooper, *Colonialism in question: Theory, knowledge, history* (Berkeley, CA, 2005), p. 25.

<sup>30</sup> Ann Laura Stoler, *Carnal knowledge and imperial power: Race and the intimate in colonial rule* (Berkeley, CA, 2002), p. 12.

<sup>31</sup> Prominent examples include John William Kaye, *The life and correspondence of Charles, Lord Metcalfe*, 2 vols. (London, 1858); Edward Thompson, *The life of Charles, Lord Metcalfe* (London, 1937); T.E. Colebrooke, *Life of the Honourable Mountstuart Elphinstone* (London, 1884).

about.<sup>32</sup> Beyond their practical role in the Company's expansion, Elphinstone and Metcalfe forged a distinctive intellectual legacy; both were leading figures in the 'conservative Orientalist' school, and Elphinstone's *History of India: The Hindu and Mohametan periods* (1841) would become stock reading for young Company recruits for decades.<sup>33</sup>

Far from adulating the professional and personal qualities of men like Metcalfe and Elphinstone, however, this project will examine how these individuals self-consciously constructed themselves, in varying ways and multiple theatres, to appear powerful and authoritative. Such self-fashioning was a means of securing status and influence both at Indian courts as well as in the eyes of the Company's central administration; it involved far from laudable tactics, usually amounting to methodical and systematic attempts to disempower and discredit Indian political actors. One important site in which this process of self-fashioning played out was in letters, and my reading of the Residents' correspondence will therefore be highly critical, informed by recent scholarship on epistolarity which emphasizes the extent to which letter-writing was a performance, 'an 'act' in the theatrical sense as well as a 'speech-act' in the linguistic.'<sup>34</sup> Letters were written with an audience in mind; their language and contents were tailored for a purpose. An important consideration for letter-writers was the probability that their letter would become public, given that it was common practice at the time to forward letters of interest to friends, kin, and colleagues, or to read them aloud in company. Even when writing to family in Britain, then, Company men might engage in understatement, misrepresentation, or embellishment; Sarah Pearsall, describing the correspondence of trans-Atlantic families in the late eighteenth century, argues that many letter-writers used emotive and sentimental language as a means of manufacturing intimacy with geographically distant friends and family, as well out of a desire to conform to the literary and epistolary conventions of the time which emphasized spontaneity and sensibility.<sup>35</sup> Letters were therefore instruments through which Residents endeavoured to represent and thus in a sense produce identities and relationships. Accordingly, this dissertation will approach the Residents' testimony with caution; their activities will be dissected and deciphered instead of applauded.

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<sup>32</sup> John William Kaye, *Lives of Indian officers, illustrative of the history of the civil and military services of India* (London, 1867), p. 235.

<sup>33</sup> Martha McLaren, *British India and British Scotland, 1780-1830: Career building, empire building, and a Scottish school of thought on Indian governance* (Akron, OH, 2001), p. 246.

<sup>34</sup> Bruce Redford, *The converse of the pen: Acts of intimacy in the eighteenth-century familiar letter* (Chicago, 1986), p. 2. Recent studies have emphasized the importance of the familiar letter as a way of producing and performing individual identities; see the essays collected in Rebecca Earle (ed.), *Epistolary selves: Letters and letter-writers, 1600-1945* (Aldershot, 1999).

<sup>35</sup> Sarah Pearsall, *Atlantic families lives and letters in the later eighteenth century* (Oxford, 2008), p. 15.

It is also important to note that not all the Residents were as professionally successful as Elphinstone and Metcalfe. These overachievers were outnumbered in the political line by men who inspired controversy or dispute, men who earned the disapprobation of the central administration, and, of course, men who merely seem to have plodded along unremarked. Some of these Residents, viewed from Calcutta, were disturbingly or frustratingly blind to the imperatives of civilised society; they were men who could not negotiate the paradoxes of the British empire in India, men who arrogated power to themselves at the expense of the Company's interests. The Residency records are replete with stories of failure and mediocrity, nor were apparent success stories like Elphinstone and Metcalfe exempt from these strains, as their letters and diaries make plain. These pragmatic difficulties, though particularly acute in the political line, reflect the broader problems confronting the Company as a whole. The Residents' experiences speak powerfully to the ways in which large-scale changes, disruptions, and ideological tensions produced practical as well as conceptual dilemmas. They remind us that the Residencies were in fact arenas in which struggles for power and status unfolded, though how exactly the Resident was meant to establish and express his authority was far from clear and therefore apt to be misjudged.

Some of the most heated debates of this kind centred around the extent to which the Company's representatives should assimilate into Indian political culture, reflecting broader anxieties about imperial governance and transculturation. On the one hand, Residents and their superiors believed, to varying degrees, that it was important to express political power in ways that would be intelligible to the surrounding population and that resonated with Indian ideas about political legitimacy. On the other, the Residents' superiors feared that the adoption of certain purportedly Indian styles of rule would have a corrosive effect on their imperial agents, as well as potentially undermining the reputation for British moral probity and rule of law which they desired to cultivate in India. The Residents were thus put in a double-bind. To establish themselves at Indian courts they had to engage, to some extent, with Indian political culture; in so doing, however, they threatened to subvert the carefully constructed differences, between 'civilized' Britons and barbarous Indians, upon which the legitimacy of the British East India Company's administration was believed to rest. Because of this paradox, Residents were in regular disagreement with their superiors about issues ranging from the purchase of gifts to corporal punishment. A general feature of modern imperial administrations was the endeavour to construct distinctions between colonised and colonising populations to bolster imperial rule.<sup>36</sup> Through the Residents, we can see not only how fragile but how contested that rule of colonial difference was.

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<sup>36</sup> Jane Burbank and Frederick Cooper, *Empires in world history: Power and the politics of difference* (Princeton, NJ, 2010), p. 12.



The tensions which erupted within the political line were also symptomatic of the problems associated with an expanding empire. Suspicions about the corruptibility of the Resident's character were intensified by the geographical distance separating the Residencies from the scrutiny of government headquarters in Calcutta. As Duncan Bell has observed, from the perspective of nineteenth-century commentators the problem of distance inhered, not simply in the practical, administrative difficulties posed by travel and communication, but also the attenuation of crucial bonds of loyalty and citizenship.<sup>37</sup> Meanwhile, The Residents resented the feeling of labouring away in obscurity. Though Residents were closely bound up with the government in their capacity as diplomatic representatives, they nevertheless tended to regard the Company's central administration with a measure of acrimony, perceiving it as a distant entity from which one could expect little support or recognition. Geographical distance vested the Residents with significant discretionary power, but this power was double-edged; while Residents had the independence to act according to their interests, they were easily scapegoated if problems emerged at the court where they were stationed. It has become a truism that the Court of Directors had little knowledge or control over the management of empire in the everyday sense, and historians increasingly emphasize the distance between the Company official on the ground and the Governor-General ensconced in his offices in Calcutta.<sup>38</sup> Given their political significance the Residents exemplify in perhaps their most acute form the consequences which geographical distance could have, and the distrust and suspicion which it could generate. Through the Residents, then, we can probe an important division running through the Company's operations.

These problems intersected with concerns about good governance and administrative efficacy which were attracting growing attention in Europe during the period under study. Beginning in the late eighteenth century, as historian Philip Harling has pointed out, a series of small reforms combined to create a concerted push for greater accountability and transparency in the British civil service.<sup>39</sup> Although government critics of the time accused Pitt the Younger and his followers of exploiting the wartime context to raise taxes as a means of funnelling money into the pockets of office-holders and government administrators, historians have since suggested that the Pitt administration made tentative steps towards abolishing sinecures and regulating the profits of office, introducing salaries in place of fees

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<sup>37</sup> Duncan S.A. Bell, 'Dissolving distance: Technology, space, and empire in British political thought, 1770-1900', *The Journal of Modern History*, 77:3 (2005): 531-2.

<sup>38</sup> H.V. Bowen, *The business of empire: The East India Company and imperial Britain, 1756-1833* (Cambridge, 2006), p. 180; Martin Moir, 'Khagazi Raj: Notes on the documentary basis of Company rule, 1773-1858', *Indo-British Review*, 21 (1993): 185-93.

<sup>39</sup> Philip Harling, *The waning of 'Old Corruption': The politics of economical reform in Britain, 1779-1846* (Oxford, 1996), p. 22.

in an attempt to discourage exploitative activities on the part of government officials.<sup>40</sup> Under Pitt, government departments were reorganized and more rigorous standards of proficiency were applied to government officials.<sup>41</sup> This is part of what historian Peter Jupp has identified as an emergent professional ethic, a trend which gained momentum following the Napoleonic Wars.<sup>42</sup> A position in the civil service was beginning to be considered as a public trust, rather than personal property; in principle, official activity was increasingly dissociated from private life, and public money and business assets were being more sharply distinguished from private wealth.<sup>43</sup>

This push for accountability and merit was equally visible within the East India Company, manifested, for instance, in the foundation of colleges in Calcutta and Hertfordshire.<sup>44</sup> The Residents too were affected by this larger pattern, their expenses subject to the harsh scrutiny of the public auditor, their every act rigorously recorded in writing (or so they claimed) and dispatched to their superiors in Calcutta. Yet administrators in Calcutta had reason to fear that the Residents were not respecting the line between public and private as they ought to have done, and indeed within the Company at large the distinction between public and private domains, though acknowledged, was uncertain and contested. After all, most men in the Company's service were bound together through ties of blood and friendship, and were liable to use these connections for personal and professional advancement. There was likewise a long tradition within the Company of officials using their public positions to secure private emolument, and the Residents were particularly suspect in this regard given their geographical distance from administrative centres, and their proximity to wealthy Indian elites.<sup>45</sup> Recurring controversies within the political line suggest that this messy interpenetration of private and public life was recognized to be a critical problem without an easy solution. Through the Residents, then, we can consider issues which might be classed as the growing pains of an expanding, modernizing empire; doubts relating to the uncertain boundary dividing colonizer and colonized, the burgeoning geographical distance separating the agents of empire from centres of calculation and control, and, finally, the blurred line between public servant and private individual.

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<sup>40</sup> Philip Harling, 'Rethinking "Old Corruption"', *P&P*, 147 (1995): 131.

<sup>41</sup> Michael J. Turner, *British politics in an age of reform* (Manchester, 1999), p. 38.

<sup>42</sup> Peter Jupp, 'The landed elite and political authority in Britain, ca. 1760-1850', *JBS*, 29:1 (1990): 64. See also Philip Harling and Peter Mandler, 'From "fiscal-military" state to laissez-faire state, 1760-1850', *JBS*, 32:1 (1993): 54-55.

<sup>43</sup> For a general account of this trend see Boyd Hilton, *A mad, bad, and dangerous people? England 1783-1846* (Oxford, 2006), p. 120-124.

<sup>44</sup> Callie Wilkinson, 'The East India College debate and the fashioning of imperial officials, 1806-1858', *HJ*, forthcoming (DOI: <http://doi.org/10.1017/S0018246X16000492>), p. 6.

<sup>45</sup> For corruption in the Company in the eighteenth century, see Travers, *Ideology and empire*, p. 211; Bowen, *The business of empire*, p. 182.

### 3. Diplomatic culture beyond treaty-making and courtly ceremonial

Although Residents embody broad patterns evident in other parts of the Company's service, they were also subject to unique pressures and expectations because of their place at court. Comparisons with diplomats can therefore help to elucidate certain aspects of the Residents' experiences. Although the Resident's role was not that of an ambassador in the traditional sense, the two shared certain important features in common: both had a representative function, and both were situated at an interstitial position between cultures. In the diplomatic service, the lines between private and public could become even more contested than in other branches of the civil service, since the diplomatic representative was in a sense supposed to physically embody the state, meaning that his appearance and behaviour were politically charged. The distinction between public and private in the diplomatic service was especially blurred in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth century when diplomacy was still in an uneven state of professionalization, and played out in royal courts rather than government offices.<sup>46</sup> Moreover, while it is precisely the diplomat's role to link two states, this in-between position could expose the diplomat to scrutiny and suspicion on both sides, since his attachment to one or the other was in doubt.<sup>47</sup> Fears of 'going native' applied to diplomats as much as to imperial officials, as the model of resident diplomacy developed into a global phenomenon in the early nineteenth century.<sup>48</sup>

These underlying tensions at the heart of diplomatic practice have received renewed attention by historians in recent years in the form of what some commentators have dubbed 'New Diplomatic History'. This approach is interdisciplinary in ideas and methods, as history, anthropology, and international relations studies converge to bring to the fore previously neglected or taken-for-granted aspects of international diplomacy. One of the dominant features of this new approach is a broadening of the definition of diplomacy to encompass a range of activities through which contemporaries attempted to mediate and persuade; in so doing, many of these studies emphasize the interventions of unofficial actors, bringing the role of merchants, sailors, and border populations into view.<sup>49</sup> Also characteristic is a conscious attention to the practice and process of diplomacy, focusing less on the principles enshrined in texts and treaties and more on the norms and conventions enacted on the ground.

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<sup>46</sup> D.B. Horn, *The British diplomatic service 1689-1789* (Oxford, 1961), p. 12; Keith Hamilton and Richard Langhorne, *The practice of diplomacy: Its evolution, theory, and administration* (London, 2010), p. 2.

<sup>47</sup> Noé Cornago, *Plural diplomacies: Normative predicaments and functional imperatives* (Leiden, 2013), p. 31; 28.

<sup>48</sup> Markus Mosslang and Torsten Riotte (eds.), *The diplomat's world: A cultural history of diplomacy, 1815-1914* (Oxford, 2008), p. 4.

<sup>49</sup> For current state of the field, see special issue on 'Everyday diplomacy' in *The Cambridge Journal of Anthropology*, 34:2 (2016).

Iver B. Neumann, a theorist of international relations with practical experience in diplomacy, has been particularly influential in calling attention to the institutionalized practices which make up international relations.<sup>50</sup> In history, the definitive figure is probably Daniela Frigo, particularly in her edited collection of essays, *Politics and diplomacy in early modern Italy: The structure of diplomatic practice, 1450-1800*.<sup>51</sup>

The field has experienced an additional jolt of rejuvenation as students of global history have begun to recognize the attractiveness of diplomacy as a site for studying cross-cultural interactions. Rejecting the notion prevalent in the 1950s and 1960s that diplomacy occurred within a mutually agreed and universally understood intellectual and cultural framework, anthropologists and global historians have become increasingly attentive to the ways in which diplomatic ideas and practices varied across space and time. Far from arguing for any kind of cultural incommensurability, historians working in this vein have emphasized how even in contexts where different diplomatic traditions appeared to be in conflict, diplomatic agents on both sides of the encounter often managed to make themselves understood and to negotiate and forge lasting relationships. A well-known instance of this approach is Christian Windler's study of changing Franco-Tunisian relations from the Ancien Régime to the Restoration, a history which emphasizes how Christians and Muslims developed a common diplomatic culture during a revolutionary century.<sup>52</sup> Accounts of diplomatic mediation across religious and linguistic lines are particularly prevalent in scholarship on the Mediterranean, but the appeal of this kind of project has resonated with early modernists more generally, who focus on the development of diplomatic norms and conventions during an age of exploration and intensifying global contacts and connections.<sup>53</sup> In the Indian context, this is reflected in the preponderance of work on the mission of Sir Thomas Roe, the first English ambassador to the Mughal Emperor.<sup>54</sup>

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<sup>50</sup> Iver B. Neumann, 'Returning practice to the linguistic turn: The case of diplomacy', *Millenium: Journal of International Studies*, 31:1 (2002): 651; Iver B. Neumann, *At home with the diplomats: Inside a European foreign ministry* (Ithaca, NY, 2012), p. 2.

<sup>51</sup> Daniela Frigo, ed., *Politics and diplomacy in early modern Italy: The structure of diplomatic practice, 1450-1800*, trans. Adrian Belton (Cambridge, 2009), p. 6.

<sup>52</sup> Christian Windler, *La diplomatie comme expérience de l'autre: Consuls français au Maghreb (1700-1840)* (Genève, 2002). See also his article, 'Diplomatic history as a field for cultural analysis: Muslim-Christian Relations in Tunis, 1700-1840', *HJ*, 44:1 (2001): 79-106.

<sup>53</sup> See for example essays collected in special issue on 'Diplomacy and cultural translation in the early modern world', *Journal of Early Modern History*, 20:4 (2016).

<sup>54</sup> Recent studies include Colin Paul Mitchell, *Sir Thomas Roe and the Mughal Empire* (Karachi, 2000); Mehreen M. Chida-Razvi, 'The perception of reception: The importance of Sir Thomas Roe at the Mughal court of Jahangir', *Journal of World History*, 25:2/3 (2014): 263-285; Rupali Mishra, 'Diplomacy at the edge: Split interests in the Roe embassy to the Mughal court', *Journal of British Studies*, 53:1 (2014): 5-29.

My project applies many of the insights of the New Diplomatic History to the study of the Residency system, but seeks to improve on the existing scholarship by transcending a widespread fixation on courtly ceremonial.<sup>55</sup> Historians of diplomacy have perhaps understandably been drawn to the performative aspect of diplomatic ceremonies and civilities; as de Wicquefort pointed out in his famous diplomatic manual, ‘There is not a more illustrious Theatre than a Court; neither is there any Comedy, where the Actors seem less what they are in effect, than Embassadors do in their Negotiation’.<sup>56</sup> This interest in ritual encounters, particularly gift-giving, is well established in Indian historiography, to the point that it has tended to obscure other aspects of the Residents’ work. The vibrancy of this field of research is probably traceable to the influence of Bernard Cohn, who famously brought his anthropological training to bear in an essay concerning British appropriations of Indian court ceremonial and gift-giving as a means of constructing and representing British authority in India.<sup>57</sup> Cohn’s ruminations have inspired a spate of work which reflects on the minute aspects of ceremonial as a barometer for relations between the Company and the Indian state, for instance whether the Resident removed his shoes in the royal presence, or whether the ruler rose to embrace him in court.<sup>58</sup>

Yet, by focusing on brief encounters circumscribed in space and time, these historians have produced a somewhat myopic picture of Residency life. For one thing, they reduce ritual encounters to a bilateral interaction between Resident and ruler, even though these forms of ceremonial and display were at the center of vitriolic and long-running debates which pitted Company employees against each other, as Chapter 3 will illustrate. Even more seriously, by emphasizing the theatrical, the existing scholarship misrepresents the practical work which Residents were expected to do. While the etiquette which developed at Indian courts and Residencies might present an interesting example of creative cultural fusion, it is important not to let the Residents’ practical function slip into the background.<sup>59</sup> Residents did devote a great deal of energy to orchestrating ritual performances (thereby attesting to their political importance), but the bulk of the Residents’ time was nevertheless spent seated at their desks with a pen in hand. Many Residents made only occasional appearances in open court; they

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<sup>55</sup> Examples of recent studies in this vein include Maija Jansson, ‘Measured reciprocity: English ambassadorial gift exchange in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries’, *Journal of Early Modern History*, 9:3 (2005): 348-370; Cynthia Klekar, ‘“Prisoners in silken bonds”: Obligation, trade, and diplomacy in English voyages to Japan and China’, *Journal for Early Modern Cultural Studies*, 6:1 (2006): 84-105; Maxine Berg, ‘Britain, industry and perceptions of China: Matthew Boulton, and the Macartney embassy to China 1792-94’, *Journal of Global History*, 1:2 (2006): 269-288.

<sup>56</sup> Abraham de Wicquefort, *The ambassador and his functions* (London, 1716), p. 294.

<sup>57</sup> Cohn, ‘Representing authority in Victorian India,’ p. 623.

<sup>58</sup> Kooiman, ‘Meeting at the threshold,’ p. 311. See also the special issue on ‘Civil ritual in India’, *MAS*, 24:3 (1990) on royal ceremonial and Indian princely states.

<sup>59</sup> David Reynolds, ‘International history, the cultural turn and the diplomatic twitch’, *Cultural and Social History*, 3:1 (2006): 90.

spent far more time with their Indian scribes and secretaries than they did with the ruler or his ministers. This is where we can locate meaningful exchange and knowledge production, and begin to consider the nature and effects of cross-cultural encounter, as my examination of Indian state secretaries in Chapter 4 will show. The objective of this thesis is thus to strip away some of the allure of the Residencies, to penetrate past the lavish exteriors of their palatial courts and the decorous, ceremonial forms and practices which Residents adopted to get at the heart of the Resident's work. This work involved espionage, patronage, war, and coercion as much as it did spectacle.

Finally, while much of the new cultural history of diplomacy delights in explicating how seemingly intractable cultural differences were bridged, the Anglo-Indian political encounter is perhaps just as interesting for commonalities as it is for differences. Although there were important distinctions between British and Indian political culture in the early nineteenth century which this dissertation will elucidate, there were also aspects of Indian courtly etiquette, patronage and service relationships, and gender and the family which aligned with British habits and assumptions. Contemporaries tended to remark more on the contrasts and compromises than on the concordances, seemingly because many of the things that Britons and Indians had in common were also things that were taken for granted or assumed to be natural on both sides; yet these commonalities provided a foundation upon which understandings and agreements could be reached. Residents often drew stark oppositions between British and Indian society, but their assertions on this point should be read critically. In so doing, these men were effectively engaging in what legal historian Anthony Anghie has termed the 'dynamic of difference', the 'process of creating a gap between two cultures, demarcating one as universal and civilized, and the other as particular and uncivilized'.<sup>60</sup> Rather than necessarily taking the Resident at their word, this thesis makes its own comparisons to better contextualize the dynamic process of mutual interaction and exchange which took place. In this respect, my project is inspired by 'histoire croisée', which emphasizes the creative, changeable and sometimes asymmetrical nature of processes of intersection.<sup>61</sup>

#### **4. Cultural borderlands and the space between resistance and collaboration**

Given their position at the interstices of British and Indian society, the Residents are indeed alluring sites for historians interested in transfers, contact zones, and entangled histories. The Residents were generally learned and liberal men, familiar with Indian

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<sup>60</sup> Antony Anghie, *Imperialism, sovereignty, and the making of international law* (Cambridge, 2004), p. 4.

<sup>61</sup> Michael Werner and Benedicte Zimmerman, 'Beyond comparison: Histoire croisée and the challenge of reflexivity', *History and Theory*, 45:1(2006): 30-50.

languages, whose job required them to immerse themselves to an almost unmatched extent in the swirling currents of courtly life. They partook of the traditional, symbolic exchanges which formed an essential part of Mughal ritual, offering *nazr* (gold coins, the presentation of which symbolised a recognition of the ruler as the source of all wealth) and accepting *khilat* (ceremonial clothes which symbolically incorporated the recipient into the body of the monarch).<sup>62</sup> Residents chewed *paan* (a psychoactive combination of betel leaf and areca nut) and were christened with attar of roses. They smoked *hookah* and attended *nautch* dances. In a context in which interracial liaisons were increasingly discouraged by the Company administration, some Residents had zenanas of their own and some even took native wives.<sup>63</sup> Residents not only dined with the Indian elite, they employed an army of Indian servants and worked in close collaboration with Indian scribes, secretaries, and ministers. On the surface, at least, the Residencies were thus oases which, for a time anyway, escaped what Sudipta Sen has characterised as the growing social and political distance separating Britons from Indians during this period.<sup>64</sup>

In consequence, the most well-known scholarship on the Residencies tends to romanticize them as sites of cultural intersection and fusion, as hybrid spaces on the margins of British India. In *White Mughals: Love and betrayal in eighteenth-century India*, William Dalrymple depicts these native courts as ‘the borderlands of colonial India’, as ‘spaces where categories of identity, ideas of national loyalty and relations of power were often flexible, and where the possibilities for self-transformation were, at least potentially, limitless.’<sup>65</sup> This language is echoed in Maya Jasanoff’s study of imperial collectors, *Edge of empire: Lives, culture, and conquest in the East, 1750-1850*, where Lucknow is portrayed as a city which furnished its inhabitants with ‘genuinely multicultural possibilities’, offering ‘the promise of reinvention in its cosmopolitan embrace’. According to Jasanoff, ‘who you were, with whom you associated, and how you wanted to live were not either-or choices. You could bridge the boundaries.’<sup>66</sup> As the wording of the preceding quotes suggests, this strain of historiography resonates with a postmodern intellectual tradition which uses the concept of border in a metaphorical sense to highlight the juxtaposition of cultures in particular places, tending to

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<sup>62</sup> Cohn, ‘Representing authority in Victorian India,’ p. 168-169.

<sup>63</sup> Durba Ghosh, *Sex and the family in colonial India: The making of empire* (Cambridge, 2006), p. 69.

<sup>64</sup> Sudipta Sen, *Distant sovereignty: National imperialism and the origins of British India* (New York, NY, 2002), p. 123.

<sup>65</sup> William Dalrymple, *White Mughals: Love and betrayal in eighteenth-century India* (London, 2004), p. 16.

<sup>66</sup> Maya Jasanoff, *Edge of empire: Lives, culture, and conquest in the East, 1750-1850* (New York, NY, 2006), p. 58; 59.



represent such spaces as ‘zone[s] of cultural play and experimentation’.<sup>67</sup> Dalrymple and Jasanoff’s contributions have also served to reinforce a vision of the eighteenth-century as a golden age of cross-cultural harmony, an argument which derives its force from the historical commonplace that eighteenth-century understandings of human difference were more fluid and contextual than nineteenth- and twentieth-century conceptions of race.<sup>68</sup>

Both Dalrymple and Jasanoff explicitly presented their projects as attempts to unearth historical connections which suggested the possibility of mutual respect and exchange.<sup>69</sup> Taking exchange as a starting point rather than as a conclusion, I will build on Dalrymple and Jasanoff’s accounts by exploring how exchange was structured along asymmetric lines of race, gender, and class. In so doing, this dissertation muddies the dichotomies which are sometimes constructed around notions of ‘collaboration’ and ‘resistance’, and critically reflects on the concepts of agency and selfhood which are sometimes applied to understanding imperial encounters. The Subaltern Studies group probably represents in its most acute form the desire on the part of historians of India to give agency to previously marginalized populations of peasants and workers, and to emphasize resistance over collaboration (as Ranajit Guha framed it in his scholarly intervention, *Dominance without hegemony: History and power in colonial India*).<sup>70</sup> Although my thesis does aim to bring to light significant acts of defiance which have previously been elided (including open revolt), I do not think that ‘collaboration’ and ‘resistance’ can be so easily disentangled. As Walter Johnson observed with regards to the role of agency in historical scholarship on slavery, the very notion rests on a liberal conception of selfhood, premised on independence and choice, which is far from a historical constant.<sup>71</sup> Even with respect to ostensibly free, modern citizens, Lauren Berlant has argued that ‘in the scene of slow death, a condition of being worn out by the activity of reproducing life, agency can be an activity of maintenance, not making’; Berlant suggests the term ‘lateral agency’ to encompass how, under conditions of duress,

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<sup>67</sup> Hastings Donnan and Thomas M. Wilson, *Borders: Frontiers of identity, nation and state* (Oxford, 1999), p. 39.

<sup>68</sup> See specifically Jasanoff, *Edge of empire*, p. 11-12. For fluidity of eighteenth-century conceptions of human difference, see Roxann Wheeler, *The complexion of race: Categories of difference in eighteenth-century British culture* (Philadelphia, PA, 2000), p. 15; David Arnold, ‘Race, place and bodily difference in early nineteenth-century India’, *Historical Research*, 77:196 (2004): 254-273. For a critique of these conventions, see Shruti Kapila, ‘Race matters: Orientalism and religion, India and beyond c. 1770-1880’, *MAS*, 41:3 (2007): 471-513.

<sup>69</sup> Jasanoff, *Edge of empire*, p. 7.

<sup>70</sup> Ranajit Guha, *Dominance without hegemony: History and power in colonial India* (Cambridge, MA, 1997), p. 86-87. For the classic statement of the Subaltern Studies agenda, see Ranajit Guha, ‘On some aspects of the historiography of colonial India’, in *Selected Subaltern Studies*, eds. Ranajit Guha and Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak, eds. (New York, NY, 1998), p. 44.

<sup>71</sup> Walter Johnson, ‘On agency’, *Journal of Social History*, 37:1 (2003): 115. For gender and agency, see Lynn M. Thomas, ‘Historicising agency’, *Gender & History*, 28:2 (2016): 324-339.

people might seek simply to survive rather than acting in a 'life-building way – the way that liberal subjects are supposed to.'<sup>72</sup> By applying these insights to the activities of Indians of various backgrounds at court, I will seek to remain sensitive to the changing circumstances which conditioned their actions relative to British imperial agents, recognizing that these cross-cultural relationships were sometimes points of pragmatism or exigency rather than free choice.

However partial or contingent their commitment to the Company might have been, without the support and assistance of Indian administrators and political elites the Resident would have struggled to navigate the rocky shoals of courtly politics. Given their reliance on Indian state secretaries, the Residents are an especially useful source for addressing a major point of contestation within the field of world history, the role of cultural intermediaries in imperial administration and the construction of colonial knowledge. Edward Said famously described European scholarship on the Orient as a form of power; by constructing the Orient in particular ways, by claiming to know it, Western Europeans thereby claimed their right to speak for the Orient and indeed to rule it.<sup>73</sup> In an Indian context, historians like Bernard Cohn, Lata Mani, and Nicholas Dirks have likewise portrayed colonial knowledge as an imposition and a form of control.<sup>74</sup> This historiography has been criticized, however, for obscuring the crucial role played by intermediaries, whose essential services as translators and interpreters in many cases made the colonial knowledge-making project possible.<sup>75</sup> This revisionist strand of scholarship, which presents colonial knowledge as a product of Anglo-Indian dialogue, has in its turn been criticized for underrating the ways in which non-European agency was limited in an imperial context.<sup>76</sup> Historians continue to pursue a more refined understanding of the interaction between colonizers and colonized in imperial settings, increasingly approaching empire as a 'shared but differentiated space'.<sup>77</sup> Still, the precise nature of that differentiation, namely, the power dynamic framing the encounters between British officials and Indian

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<sup>72</sup> Lauren Berlant, 'Slow death (sovereignty, obesity, lateral agency)', *Critical Inquiry*, 33:4 (2007), 759.

<sup>73</sup> Edward W. Said, *Orientalism* (London, 1978), p. 3.

<sup>74</sup> Bernard S. Cohn, *Colonialism and its forms of knowledge: The British in India* (Princeton, NJ, 1998), p. 4; Lata Mani, *Contentious traditions: The debate on sati in colonial India* (Berkeley, CA, 1998), p. 192; Nicholas B. Dirks, *Castes of mind: Colonialism and the making of modern India* (Princeton, NJ, 2001), p. 309-312.

<sup>75</sup> Eugene F. Irschick, *Dialogue and history: Constructing South India, 1795-1895* (Berkeley, CA, 1994), p. 6-8; C. A. Bayly, *Empire and information: Intelligence gathering and social communication in India, 1780-1870* (Cambridge, 1996), p. 369-370; Norbert Peabody, 'Cents, sense, census: Human inventories in late precolonial and early colonial India', *CSSH*, 43:4 (2001): 819-820.

<sup>76</sup> Dirks, *Castes of mind*, p. 309-12.

<sup>77</sup> Ann Laura Stoler and Frederick Cooper, 'Between metropole and colony: Rethinking a research agenda', in *Tensions of empire: Colonial Cultures in a bourgeois world*, eds. Ann Laura Stoler and Frederick Cooper (Berkeley, CA, 1997), p. 3-4.

intermediaries, remains inadequately analyzed. Historians such as Michael Dodson and Kapil Raj have elucidated the ways in which Indian experts shaped British knowledge about and engagement with India, whether in Oriental studies or in the realm of the law, but their interest lies primarily in the intellectual implications of these exchanges. Rarely have historians addressed the pragmatics of Anglo-Indian superordinate-subordinate relationships, for instance, the strategies munshis might have used to secure their position or lay claim to the perks of the job, and the obstacles they encountered in so doing.<sup>78</sup>

The Residents are also a useful avenue for contributing to a rich vein in the history of cross-cultural encounters focused on the role of women and the influence of conflicting gender constructs. On an abstract level, Nancy Shoemaker argued that in the North American context at least gendered language and gendered metaphors provided a baseline of shared assumptions enabling Europeans and indigenous peoples to negotiate.<sup>79</sup> In a similar vein, in a volume specifically focused on Native American women's role as 'negotiators of change', Kathleen M. Brown introduced the influential concept of 'gender frontier' to describe how culturally-specific gender constructs shaped the interactions of Europeans and Native Americans and their perceptions of each other.<sup>80</sup> Practically speaking, indigenous women who cohabitated with European men have also been identified as important cultural brokers who passed on crucial knowledge and facilitated communication and social integration.<sup>81</sup> In the Indian context, Durba Ghosh has suggested that the cohabitation of British men and native women was central to the operation of the British East India Company's empire.<sup>82</sup> Yet, analyses of the Company's relations with independent Indian kingdoms have neglected how evolving forms of indirect rule were shaped by the agency of elite women and the confrontation of British and Indian gender constructs. This thesis will shed new light on the Company's imperial expansion by highlighting the role of royal women in abetting, exploiting, or resisting the Company's political incursions at Indian courts.

## 5. Methods and sources

Rather than constructing a broad chronological narrative, this dissertation hones in on a brief, coherent, and historically significant unit of time when some of the most important

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<sup>78</sup> Michael Dodson, *Orientalism, empire, and national culture* (Houndmills, Basingstoke, 2007); Kapil Raj, 'The historical anatomy of a contact zone', *IESHR*, 48:1 (2011): 55-82.

<sup>79</sup> Nancy Shoemaker, 'An alliance between men: Gender metaphors in eighteenth-century American Indian diplomacy east of the Mississippi', *Ethnohistory*, 46:2 (1999): 240.

<sup>80</sup> Kathleen M. Brown, 'The Anglo-Algonquian gender frontier', in *Negotiators of change: historical perspectives on Native American women*, ed. Nancy Shoemaker (New York, NY, 1995), p. 27.

<sup>81</sup> Richard White, *The middle ground: Indians, empires, and republics in the Great Lakes region, 1650-1815*, 20<sup>th</sup> anniversary edn., (New York, NY, 2011), p. 74.

<sup>82</sup> Ghosh, *Sex and the family in colonial India*, p. 1.

subsidiary alliances were concluded.<sup>83</sup> The aim is not only to paint a richer and more nuanced portrait of the British Residencies at a crucial juncture, but also to identify and explicate the tactics which made up the emergent forms of imperial influence at Indian courts. Rather than trying to construct an ideal type or identify a paradigmatic example of how a Resident thought and behaved, this dissertation recaptures the messy and experimental nature of early attempts to consolidate the Company's political predominance. Although certain broad patterns did apply to the Residents as a group, this dissertation does not shy away from idiosyncrasies. Instead, it uses them to illustrate the spectrum of possibilities available at this protean moment in the history of the Company's diplomatic line.

The Indian princely states numbered into the hundreds, but this dissertation will focus more specifically on the Residents stationed at the major Indian courts of Hyderabad, Awadh (capital city Lucknow), Delhi, and Travancore (capital city Trivandrum), in addition to the Maratha courts at Poona and Nagpur, and the itinerant court of the Maratha chieftain Sindhia (nominally based in Gwalior and Ujjain). These Indian states differed from one another in important ways; most obviously, they had different relationships with the Company resulting in varying levels of intervention by the Resident. At one extreme, the Resident at Delhi effectively ruled in the Mughal Emperor's stead following the Company's occupation of the city in 1803, and was accordingly charged with a range of responsibilities over neighbouring districts which other Residents did not have.<sup>84</sup> At the other end of the spectrum, the Residents attached to Sindhia and the Rajah of Berar were essentially ambassadors with little influence over state administration, since neither Sindhia nor the Rajah were then bound to the Company through subsidiary alliances.<sup>85</sup>

Other factors also distinguished the Residents' experiences at different courts. In addition to their varying relations with the Company, courts differed greatly in terms of accessibility. Delhi, Lucknow, and Poona were well-connected, popular with tourists, and had large European populations, while Nagpur was notoriously isolated; the Resident at Nagpur could go years at a time without receiving a single European visitor, while the Resident at Delhi was burdened with the heavy cost of providing hospitality to the many European

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<sup>83</sup> Significant subsidiary alliances were concluded with Hyderabad in 1798; with the Peshwa of Poona in 1802; with Sindhia in 1817; and with the Rajah of Nagpur in 1818. Delhi was occupied in 1803.

<sup>84</sup> For British relations with Rajputana and the Cis-Sutlej States, see K.N. Panikkar, *British diplomacy in North India: A study of the Delhi Residency 1803-1857* (New Delhi, 1968), p. 42-99.

<sup>85</sup> Although the treaty of 1801 technically ended the Company's subsidiary alliance with the Nawab Vizier of Awadh (which dated back to 1773) by ceding territory to the Company in payment for a subsidiary force, the Resident continued to play an active part in courtly politics at Lucknow.

inhabitants and travellers through his city.<sup>86</sup> As Charles Metcalfe explained it, ‘the Residency at Nagpoor is out of the circle of European Society. The table to be kept is rarely for more than the Resident’s family, four or five in number,’ whereas ‘the Table at the Residency of Delhi, which is in the midst of a large European society looking up to the Resident as the Representative of Government, must be calculated with a view to the frequent entertainment of sixty or a hundred persons or as many as the house will hold.’<sup>87</sup> Another difference which was much remarked on at the time was in the degree of formality and ceremonial expected by individual rulers. The Marathas were described approvingly as plain-spoken and pragmatic, little inclined to excess; Raghoji Bhonsla was particularly notorious for treating the members of his court with ‘rustic familiarity’.<sup>88</sup> The Mughal capitals, on the other hand, especially Delhi and Hyderabad, were often described as arduous postings for the Residents, who were required to make frequent appearances in open *darbar*. Mountstuart Elphinstone dreaded being stationed at either of these courts, complaining that ‘half one’s life there would be spent in idle & unpleasant ceremonies’, which was ‘more than any ordinary temper could bear’.<sup>89</sup>

Though the courts described in this dissertation were unique in many respects, it is nevertheless worth considering them together because both British and Indian contemporaries explicitly made these connections and comparisons at the time. All the courts discussed in this dissertation were bound together through the exchange of ambassadors, spies, newsletters, and correspondence, as Chapter 1 will show. The Indian political elite were highly attuned to developments at different royal centres, and these developments informed their strategizing. The Company, for their part, were conscious of the scrutiny they were under and the ripple effect that could ensue because of shifts in practice or policy at a single court. This was particularly true of the Maratha courts, whose historical relationships with one another, frequently tense but always close, were a recurring source of disquiet to the Company who sought ceaselessly to divide them. Just as importantly, Residents themselves regularly moved between courts during their careers, and their transience makes it necessary to take a broader view in order to understand the experiences and attitudes they brought to bear on their work as Company representatives.<sup>90</sup> For, although Residents explicitly recognized the

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<sup>86</sup> Richard Jenkins to C.T. Metcalfe, 27 Dec. 1813, Letter books of Sir Richard Jenkins, Mss Eur E111, OIOC, p. 208.

<sup>87</sup> C.T. Metcalfe to John Adam, 30 Aug. 1815, BC, IOR/F/4/552/13387, OIOC, p. 47-48.

<sup>88</sup> ‘A collection of original memoirs illustrative of the revenues, resources, statistics and governments of the modern states of the Dekan’, Mackenzie General Collection, Mss Eur Mack Gen XLIII, OIOC, p. 308.

<sup>89</sup> Mountstuart Elphinstone to John Adam, 22 Apr. 1810, Letters from Mountstuart Elphinstone to John Adam, Papers of John Adam, Mss Eur F109/89, OIOC, np.

<sup>90</sup> For instance, both Thomas Sydenham and Henry Russell were briefly appointed Acting Residents at Poona in addition to their time as Residents at Hyderabad; Mountstuart Elphinstone was posted to Nagpur before moving on to take up the Residency at Poona.

idiosyncrasies of different courts, they nevertheless considered the Residencies to form part of a system which spanned the subcontinent.

Even where significant cultural differences would seem to create sharp distinctions between kingdoms, for instance whether they were Hindu or Muslim, in practice the courts discussed in this dissertation had much in common. Eighteenth-century Indian polities tended to be religiously eclectic and inclusive, actively supporting a diverse array of religious practices and institutions.<sup>91</sup> Although the Marathas were a loose confederacy of Hindu powers which emerged in opposition to the Muslim Mughal Emperor, in the process they appropriated many of the central features of Mughal ceremonial and bureaucracy. The outward manifestations of royal legitimacy, for instance the exchange of ceremonial robes, were practiced across religious lines by former officers of the Mughal Emperor as well as by the Marathas.<sup>92</sup> And although Marathi was the language of balladry, story-telling, and conversation at Maratha courts, Persian predominated as the language of politics and interstate diplomacy, meaning that these courts were also important sites of patronage and employment for the Persianized scribal elite.<sup>93</sup> The Malayalam-speaking Hindu court at Travancore, being further south, did not operate in the Mughal idiom to the same extent; still, Travancore, too, was part of this wider network of intelligence and exchange.<sup>94</sup> As Susan Bayly has argued, too often the history of Kerala is considered in isolation from developments in the rest of India when in fact Travancore was a conquest state comparable to the Marathas, and subject to many of the same pressures as the kingdoms to the north.<sup>95</sup> For the purposes of this dissertation, the dynamics between Resident, ruler, and minister at Travancore were so like the patterns which emerged at other courts that Travancore ought rightly to be considered as part of this broader story. By treating these various courts within a single analytical frame, this dissertation thus recognizes and elaborates on their connected history.

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<sup>91</sup> Susan Bayly, *Caste, society, and politics in India from the eighteenth century to the modern age* (Cambridge, 1999), p. 68; Lloyd I. Rudolph and Susanne Hoeber Rudolph, 'The subcontinental empire and the regional kingdom in Indian state formation', in *Region and nation in India*, ed. Paul Wallace (New Delhi, 1985), p. 44.

<sup>92</sup> J.F. Richards, 'The formulation of imperial authority under Akbar and Jahangir', in *Kingship and authority in South Asia*, ed. J.F. Richards (Delhi, 1998), p. 293.

<sup>93</sup> Sumit Guha, 'Transitions and translations: regional power and vernacular identity in the Dakhan c. 1500-1800', *CSSAAME*, 24:2 (2004): 29; Prachi Deshpande, *Creative pasts: Historical memory and identity in western India, 1700-1960* (New York, NY, 2007), p. 62. According to Resident Barry Close, the Peshwa used Persian in all state papers and public correspondence. Barry Close to Josiah Webbe, 17 Jun. 1800, Cleveland Papers, wq091.92 c6241, reel no. 4212, OIOC, p. 126.

<sup>94</sup> For instance, the Rajah of Travancore and the Nizam of Hyderabad regularly exchanged letters and presents. See translation of munshi Azizullah's report of his conference with the Nizam's minister, 29 May 1800, HM, IOR/H/564a, OIOC, p. 285.

<sup>95</sup> Susan Bayly, 'Hindu kingship and the origin of community: religion, state and society in Kerala, 1750-1850'. *MAS*, 18:2 (1984): 178; 186.

The main sources for this project are the letters and papers of the Residents themselves, both official and unofficial, as well as the orders and instructions issued by the Court of Directors in London and the Governor-General-in-Council in Calcutta. Although the Residents did on occasion correspond with the Bombay and Madras Presidencies, these Presidencies will not figure prominently in this dissertation. In their infancy, the Residencies were indeed subject to jurisdictional disputes between the competing governments who sought to exert control over neighbouring states. By the late eighteenth century, however, Governors-General like Richard Wellesley had effectively stamped out these challenges to their authority, and it was therefore unquestionably to Calcutta that the Residents looked for instructions and support.<sup>96</sup>

In addition to the Residents' correspondence, another important source for this project, which raises unique problems of its own, are the petitions which the Residents received from Indians at court. As is characteristic of the form, these petitions were written in deferential language, with the aim of convincing; they are intrinsically argumentative, and need to be read as such.<sup>97</sup> There is, moreover, a long tradition of petitioning in India, meaning that the language of these petitions was to some degree formulaic; it is also worth considering that the petitions attributed to royal family members were probably written by scribes, whose influence over the finished text is difficult to determine.<sup>98</sup> Even so, these petitions are revealing of how different Indian actors viewed the Company, and the possible opportunities they thought the Resident might represent. Through them, we can get a sense of how Indians at court sought to bend the Residency system to their will, and why, as Chapters 4 and 5 will illustrate in greater depth.

Prescriptive literature will also be used to contextualize the Residents' statements and activities. Though by its very nature prescriptive literature often reflects an ideal rather than a reality, it can nevertheless help us reconstruct the prevailing assumptions and models for appropriate behaviour which framed the Residents' actions. There were a few conduct books for Company officials which were widely read during this period and which will be consulted throughout this dissertation, but even more important are legal treatises and diplomatic manuals.<sup>99</sup> The eighteenth century witnessed the development of a widespread and relatively

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<sup>96</sup> Fisher, *Indirect rule in India*, p. 85.

<sup>97</sup> On petitions as a source, see introduction to Lex Heerma van Voss (ed.), *Petitions in social history* (Cambridge, 2002), especially p. 2; 6.

<sup>98</sup> On the Indian tradition of petitioning, see Majid Siddiqi, *The British historical context and petitioning in colonial India* (New Delhi, 2005).

<sup>99</sup> These include Thomas Williamson, *The East India Vade-Mecum* (London, 1810); John Briggs, *Letters addressed to a young person in India* (London, 1828), including notes of instruction by John Malcolm.

homogeneous diplomatic culture.<sup>100</sup> Whether or not the Residents actually read the classic manuals by Wicquefort, de Callières, Pecquet, or von Martens (there is clear evidence that some of them did), the ideas contained in these texts were so widespread that they doubtless informed the way in which Residents and their contemporaries thought about interstate relations and diplomatic practice.<sup>101</sup> At the same time, by reading Residency archives alongside legal treatises and diplomatic manuals, we see the ways in which Residents deviated from diplomatic norms. These deviations help us to understand what was unique about the Residency system, suggesting how the Company's developing imperial influence at Indian courts diverged from European precedents.

## 6. Summary

The chapters are organized thematically, focusing on the key strategies through which Residents sought to establish and consolidate a position of influence at court, and the obstacles which they confronted in so doing. Throughout, the dissertation will highlight divisions within the Company as well as tensions which emerged between the Residents and the court. The first chapter will focus on the collection and circulation of political intelligence, examining how the Residents managed the flow of letters between political centres and the gossip spreading through royal capitals. In response to the activities of political factions and other hostile parties who forged letters and spread misinformation, the Residents developed sophisticated strategies for controlling how news was disseminated and interpreted. Similarly refined methods were employed for framing and representing events at court to the Governor-General-in-Council in Calcutta. Yet, as the chapter will show, even the Residents' best efforts in this arena were insufficient to repress suspicion, speculation, and secret correspondence within and between Indian courts, while the Governor-General, too, had reason to fear that the Residents' carefully composed letters concealed a rather murkier reality.

These themes of suspicion and distrust are further explored in Chapter 2, which discusses the role of violence in the emergent practice of indirect rule. Despite their role as diplomats, the Residents often doubted the effectiveness of political solutions compared to the use of physical force. This chapter will explain these convictions by situating them within

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<sup>100</sup> Hamish Scott, 'Diplomatic culture in old regime Europe', in *Cultures of power in Europe during the long eighteenth century*, eds. Hamish Scott and Brendan Simms (Cambridge, 2007), p. 59.

<sup>101</sup> For a description of the Residents' libraries, see Richard Jenkins to Thomas Sydenham, 12 May 1810, Letter books of Sir Richard Jenkins, Mss Eur E111, OIOC, p. 106-107. Important texts which will feature in this dissertation include: Abraham de Wicquefort, *The ambassador and his functions*, trans. John Digby (London, 1716); François de Callières, *The art of diplomacy*, ed. Maurice Keens-Soper and Karl W. Schweizer (New York, NY, 1983); Antoine Pecquet, *Discourse on the art of negotiation*, trans. Aleksandra Gruzinska and Murray D. Sirkis (New York, NY, 2005); Karl von Martens, *Guide diplomatique* (Leipzig, 1832).



their practical and ideological context; it will then examine their effects on the operation of the Residency system. Although these militaristic attitudes were prevalent throughout the Company, the ways in which they seeped into diplomatic practice in India was deeply troubling from the perspective of administrators in Calcutta and more especially in London. At the heart of these controversies was the question of how far British officials should adopt Indian styles of rule, and whether the Residents themselves were becoming dangerously 'Indianized' in their habits and dispositions.

The same anxieties emerged with respect to the question of gift-giving and political pageantry, the subject of Chapter 3. While the Residents' superiors acknowledged the necessity of making some material show of authority, an idea which accorded well with British notions of pomp and circumstance, they hesitated to give their entire approval to the Residents' material excess, as they viewed it. This chapter will identify some of the key tensions underlying the recurring disputes over expense claims which form such a prominent feature of Residency correspondence. The giving of gifts and other forms of lavish spending were an important component of the Resident's political toolkit, but they also provoked fears of luxury, corruption, and inappropriate relations of obligation, as well as raising the question of what the basis for the Resident's authority at Indian courts should properly be, and how it should be expressed.

How the Resident should conduct himself relative to Indians at court was another divisive issue, and the final two chapters of the thesis will consider in more depth how the Resident engaged with his two key sources of support (and occasionally opposition), the scribal elite and royal family members, respectively. Both these bodies of people had the social and cultural capital necessary to assist the Resident in his political enterprises, but precisely because of their indispensability, both represented a weakness in the Residency regime. Residents were unsure about how to calibrate these relationships so as to secure all the benefits of collaboration without opening the door to subversion. These chapters will explore not only how the Residents sought to draw on and regulate these relationships, but also how Indians of various backgrounds sought to exploit, resist, or abet the work of the Company.

Taken together, these chapters illustrate the multifaceted nature of the Resident's work and the different, mutually reinforcing foundations of his influence at court. At the same time, they also show that on every front the Resident's activities were questioned or undermined by colleagues within the Company as well as by Indians at court. Within the Company, contemporaries debated different styles of rule, and these practical and ideological divisions were exacerbated by mutual suspicions resulting from geographical distance and the

blurring of personal and public interests in the diplomatic line. This process was further complicated by the need to work through Indian elites and administrators with interests of their own. Theoretically the system of alliances was supposed to make things easier for the Company, allowing them to exercise political control over the subcontinent without shouldering the burden of internal administration. Practically this influence proved difficult to enforce, and, as the succeeding chapters will make apparent, the transition to indirect rule was therefore far from smooth. Contrary to British hopes and expectations, Indian rulers often did not make for willing or accommodating instruments for achieving the Company's interests. Ultimately the Residents found themselves treating Indian rulers and their administrations less like allies, and more like subjects.

## Chapter 1. The conquest of knowledge and the intricacies of information management

In the historiography of colonial India, it has become commonplace to assert that the consolidation of the East India Company's control in the subcontinent was made possible by a concomitant conquest of knowledge. In their different ways, both Bernard Cohn and C.A. Bayly influentially drew attention to British desires to 'know the country'.<sup>1</sup> While Cohn emphasized the mutually reinforcing relationship between imperial state-building and officialising procedures, particularly the impulse to categorize and classify, Bayly opened up a different field of inquiry: 'the information order,' a heuristic device encompassing the various, overlapping systems of collecting and distributing political intelligence which crisscrossed the Indian subcontinent.<sup>2</sup> In *Empire and information: Intelligence gathering and social communication in India 1780-1870*, a classic work populated by a rich cast of 'canny people' including astrologers, midwives, and religious mendicants, Bayly traced the changing nature of the Indian information order over the long nineteenth century and the Company's attempts to infiltrate and subordinate it. Most relevant for our purposes, Bayly highlighted the importance of Mughal institutions to the Company's dramatic imperial expansion, notably Persian newsletters, post and *palankin* routes, and scribal communities with a tradition of state service.<sup>3</sup> Yet, Bayly paid little attention to the British officials who negotiated these Mughal institutions on the Company's behalf. This chapter will provide a more intimate account of the uneven interpenetration of British and Indian information networks from the perspective of the men who stood at the interface between the two, men who linger on the margins of *Empire and information* but never fully come to the fore: the Residents.

As informants stationed at the courts of rival Indian powers, the Residents played a crucial role in the Company's intelligence-gathering project. If imperial control depended on the ability to 'listen in' on internal communications as Bayly argued, it was the Residents who did most of the listening.<sup>4</sup> At the same time, the Residents were far from being faultless, disinterested relayers of intelligence, and a major objective of this chapter is to complement existing analyses of communications infrastructure like the *dak* or the postal service by examining in greater depth the human element upon which their operations depended.<sup>5</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> C.A. Bayly, 'Knowing the country: Empire and information in India', *MAS*, 27:1 (1993): 3-43.

<sup>2</sup> Cohn, *Colonialism and its forms of knowledge*, p. 3; Bayly, *Empire and information*, p. 3-5.

<sup>3</sup> Bayly, *Empire and information*, p. 58-78.

<sup>4</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 365.

<sup>5</sup> Devyani Gupta, 'Stamping empire: Postal standardization in nineteenth-century India', in *Global scientific practice in an age of revolutions, 1750-1850*, eds. Patrick Manning and Daniel Rood (Pittsburgh, PA, 2016), p. 216-236; Nitin Sinha, *Communication and colonialism in eastern India: Bihar, 1760s-1880s* (New York, NY, 2013); Patrick Joyce, *The state of freedom: A social history of the British state since 1800* (Cambridge, 2013), p. 144-161.

Viewing the Company's intelligence-gathering systems through the eyes of key agents like the Residents highlights how flows of information were inscribed with the assumptions, interests, and concerns of the actors responsible for producing and sustaining them. Through the Residents, we are alerted to the social dimensions of intelligence-gathering: the interactions through which knowledge is produced and communicated, the assumptions, aspirations, jealousies, and resentments which shape how it is packaged and transmitted, and the various social and political interests it can serve.

We also discover, through the Residents, the finesse with which intelligence was managed and mobilized. The methods of communication available to the Residents were diverse, and they employed them strategically. Information could be performed publicly or communicated in secret letters; it could be passed on in conversation or put down officially in writing. The substance of letters and conversations could be strictly empirical or utterly speculative. The Resident could speak, write, or remain silent. Instead of simply adding to the Company's stock of knowledge, then, the Residents handled information artfully and to their own advantage, sometimes for the good of the Company they represented, and sometimes not. In fact, the Residents as a group developed and experimented with strategies specifically designed to consolidate their own position and, on occasion, to screen themselves from the gaze of their superiors. Understanding the operation of the Company's system of political surveillance therefore requires us to reconstruct the logic underpinning how individuals gathered, interpreted, assessed, and deployed knowledge.<sup>6</sup>

This chapter illustrates how the Residents learned to work within the existing information order, and the practical obstacles and active resistance they encountered in so doing. It begins by describing the Residents' struggle to expand their powers of representation and communication at Indian royal capitals, first through the composition and transmission of letters (Section 1), and then through strategies adapted to manipulating news passed through word of mouth (Section 2). The remainder of the chapter will consider the circulation of information within the Company itself. Section 3 will probe the shifting and contested boundaries between 'private' and 'public' correspondence, while Section 4 examines the representative strategies which Residents employed in their official reports to their superiors in Calcutta. Considering these various, overlapping modes of information management side by side, it becomes apparent how much the Resident's authority depended on the maintenance of accurate political intelligence and clear lines of communication, as well as how difficult these things were to secure in practice.

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<sup>6</sup> Steven Shapin, 'Here and everywhere: Sociology of scientific knowledge', *Annual Review of Sociology*, 21 (1995): 300.

## 1. Decorum, deception, and the epistolary arts

Perhaps contrary to our image of courtly diplomacy, Residents seem to have spent most of their time ensconced in their offices. From their desks, they oversaw a system of assembling and communicating information not dramatically dissimilar from the methods devised by the Mughals to survey their own empire.<sup>7</sup> In addition to the letters Residents received from their superiors in Calcutta and their colleagues in the political line, they also relied on the *akbharat* produced by news-writers stationed at Indian courts across the subcontinent.<sup>8</sup> *Akbharat* were Persian newsletters reporting on events at different royal centres, modelled on the formulaic imperial court diaries which described the activities of the Mughal Emperor and the events of his reign, ranging from his eating habits and daily exercises to his political appointments and general assemblies.<sup>9</sup> Residents supplemented the *akbharat* with more perfunctory military reports from agents placed in military encampments which described the mood and movements of Indian troops.<sup>10</sup> Added to this was news gleaned from a range of informants at court whose services were repaid with Company pensions, as well as information purchased from visiting merchants, religious mendicants, and the *harkaras* (or men of all work) who served as messengers. Mobile groups like these were particularly valuable informants. Not only did they frequent the bazaars, pilgrimage sites, and army encampments around the country where people congregated and news was exchanged, they were also able to draw on further networks of informants because of their commercial, institutional, and occupational affiliations.<sup>11</sup>

These various forms of intelligence, written and oral, were translated, assessed, and synthesised in the Residency's Intelligence Office, on the basis of which the Resident wrote reports for the Governor-General-in-Council. Information came and went from the Residency through the channel of the *dak*, a courier system with Mughal roots which, by the end of the eighteenth century, was increasingly monopolized by the East India Company.<sup>12</sup>

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<sup>7</sup> Although these intelligence establishments were often described as being 'repugnant to the feelings of an Englishman,' as in J. Sutherland, *Sketches of the relations subsisting between the British government in India, and the different native states* (Calcutta, 1833), p. 12.

<sup>8</sup> Richard Strachey to W.A. Brooke, 10 Apr. 1812, Strachey Papers, Mss Eur D514/1, OIOC, p. 92.

<sup>9</sup> For the *akbar* and their transformation under the British East India Company, see Michael H. Fisher, 'The office of *akhbar nawis*: the transition from Mughal to British forms', *MAS*, 27:1 (1993): 48.

<sup>10</sup> Richard Jenkins to Charles Russell, 15 Feb. 1807, Letter books of Sir Richard Jenkins, Mss Eur E111, OIOC, p. 8.

<sup>11</sup> Chitra Joshi, 'Dak roads, dak runners, and the reordering of communication networks', *International Review of Social History*, 57:2 (2012): 169-189; Bernard S. Cohn, 'The role of the *gosains* in the economy of eighteenth and nineteenth century upper India', *IESHR*, 1:4 (1964): 175-182; C.A. Bayly, *Rulers, townsmen and bazaars: North Indian society in the age of British expansion, 1770-1870* (Delhi, 1993), p. 143.

<sup>12</sup> Michael H. Fisher, 'The East India Company's suppression of the native *dak*', *IESHR*, 31:3 (1994): 311-348.

Correspondence was also copied out and preserved in Residency archives to serve as a frame of reference for the Resident and his successors. On first arriving at the Residency, new appointees used these archives as a means of grounding themselves in local conventions and concerns.<sup>13</sup> There was no written body of rules or set of guidelines about how a Resident should conduct himself, so the Resident often based his decisions on the precedents elaborated in these papers, particularly where points of ceremonial were concerned. The archives which historians now use to study the Residencies were therefore themselves mechanisms of Company power, repositories of social and technical knowledge which were deployed for political purposes.

Letters could also operate as diplomatic instruments in a more performative, public fashion. In the Mughal tradition, royal letters or letters from persons of authority were valued because they were believed to physically retain something of the charisma of their author, particularly when written in his own hand.<sup>14</sup> During the early seventeenth century, when the Company was still trying to secure a commercial foothold in the subcontinent, letters from English monarchs addressed to Asian rulers were a critical mechanism for establishing trade agreements.<sup>15</sup> Letters continued to play an important role in diplomatic relations into the nineteenth century; the Residents regularly commissioned letters from the Governor-General, whether of congratulation or remonstrance, which were presented or read aloud for strategic effect in open court.<sup>16</sup> The Indian political elite were very aware of the Resident's position within a larger hierarchy, which meant that he occasionally had to call on written support from his superiors to lend force to his assertions in this way. Richard Jenkins apparently had such a difficult time convincing the Rajah of Berar Raghoji Bhonsla of the Company's diplomatic intentions that he finally presented a letter to the Rajah in the Governor-General's own handwriting, 'which it is to be hoped will prevent the insinuations of interested persons from leading the Rajah into an Error respecting the designs of the British Government.'<sup>17</sup> Letters like these were handled with great ceremony, in the same way that the Governor-General's visit would have been carefully choreographed were he present in the flesh.

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<sup>13</sup> 12 Jun. 1811, Journal of Mountstuart Elphinstone, Elphinstone Collection, Mss Eur F88/370, OIOC, p. 85.

<sup>14</sup> Cohn, *Colonialism and its forms of knowledge*, p. 19.

<sup>15</sup> Miles Ogborn, *Indian ink: Script and print in the making of the English East India Company* (Chicago, 2007), p. 38.

<sup>16</sup> John Collins to Acting Governor-General George Barlow, 25 Dec. 1805, Letters from Sir John Collins, Papers of Sir George Barlow, Mss Eur F176/28, OIOC, np.; Richard Strachey to John Adam, 12 Jun. 1813, John Adam Papers, Mss Eur D585, OIOC, p. 82; Richard Jenkins to Marquess of Hastings, 14 Dec. 1814, Correspondence regarding the Pindaris, HM, IOR/H/599, OIOC, p. 474.

<sup>17</sup> Richard Jenkins to Marquess of Hastings, 11 Dec. 1814, Correspondence regarding the Pindaris, HM, IOR/H/599, OIOC, p. 464.

In addition to their symbolic power and persuasive force, letters bearing the Governor-General's signature were also important markers of legitimacy for the Resident. The credentials which the Resident carried with him on his arrival at court were critical to his acceptance and recognition as an officially sanctioned representative of the Company.<sup>18</sup> The absence of written expressions of support from Calcutta could severely undermine the Resident's authority. For this reason, it was traditional for the Governor-General to conclude every letter to the Indian ruler with a brief reference to the Resident, reminding the ruler that he deposited his entire confidence in the Resident, and that all opinions expressed by the Resident should be regarded as those of the Governor-General himself.<sup>19</sup> The significance of this seemingly trivial epistolary convention is illustrated by an incident which occurred at Nagpur around the time when Lord Cornwallis arrived in India to replace Marquess Wellesley as Governor-General. Rumours had been circulating that Cornwallis planned to remove the Resident at Nagpur Mountstuart Elphinstone from his post, and Elphinstone was worried that these rumours would only be substantiated by a letter which Cornwallis had written to the Rajah of Nagpur in which he did not reference the Resident as usual. Elphinstone begged his friend John Adam, secretary to the Governor-General, to send along new credentials in the Governor-General's name, avowing that he could 'take no step whatever without orders & consequently shall avoid the risk of being disavowed'. As a result, Elphinstone opined, 'every thing is going to ruin in consequence of the ideas occasioned by our remaining inactive (while every body else is bustling) & taking no notice of any thing that is done or doing against us.'<sup>20</sup> Residents could be influential figures at court, but only insofar as they were recognized to have the weight of the Company at their back; accordingly, the Resident's personal authority and legitimacy sometimes depended on his ability to sustain the flow of letters from the Company's administrative centres.

While it was therefore in the Resident's interest to facilitate certain lines of communication, particularly with the Governor-General, he was equally concerned to block others. This was part of the Company's broader policy of 'subordinate isolation', whereby Residents endeavoured to monitor and control communications between Indian courts as a way of preventing the formation of hostile coalitions.<sup>21</sup> As the Company began to more closely track the *dak* system, court dignitaries resorted to the use of private and unassuming

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<sup>18</sup> Letters of credence were also critical in European diplomacy. See Wicquefort, *The ambassador and his functions*, p. 109; Martens, *Guide diplomatique*, p. 48.

<sup>19</sup> See for example Earl of Minto to Daulat Rao Sindhia, 4 Jun. 1813, Out-letters 1813, Persian Correspondence, Minto Papers, MS 11594, NLS, p. 88; Minto to Nawab Vizier of Awadh, 2 Jul. 1813, Out-letters 1813, Persian Correspondence, Minto Papers, MS 11594, NLS, p. 102.

<sup>20</sup> Mountstuart Elphinstone to John Adam, 27 Aug. 1805, Mss Eur F109/89, OIOC, np.

<sup>21</sup> Ramusack, *The Indian princes and their states*, p. 68.

errand persons to deliver their messages; accordingly, the Resident and his agents were always on the look-out for concealed documents and illicit communications.<sup>22</sup> The intelligence notebooks which Mountstuart Elphinstone kept in the tension-ridden months leading up to the Third Maratha War of 1817-18 reveal that Elphinstone employed Indian agents to monitor the residences of the Peshwa and other key officials, and to follow the Peshwa on his secret business despite the latter's best efforts to disguise himself.<sup>23</sup> In addition to tracking the movement of possible messengers in and out of court, Residents also worked closely with their counterparts at other political centres to identify information leaks and trace the channels through which they flowed.<sup>24</sup>

These concerted attempts at isolation had mixed results. During this period, Indian information networks remained surprisingly resilient to Company penetration. At the outset of the Napoleonic Wars, the Resident at Poona William Palmer remarked with perplexity that 'I have no knowledge of this Coast maintaining any direct intercourse or correspondence with the French but it is (by whatever means) well and recently informed of the situation of that nation in Egypt and Europe.'<sup>25</sup> Four years later, Arthur Wellesley was outraged to discover that the Peshwa of Poona was still communicating with Frenchmen, '& has endeavoured to conceal his communications from the Agents of the British Govt & to screen the Frenchmen from their search', as well as continuing to correspond with the Maratha chieftain Sindhia (with whom the Company was then at war).<sup>26</sup>

Still, the Resident was occasionally able to discover, and expose, illicit correspondence, which he used to bolster his image of influence and omniscience at court. Tellingly, on 5 October 1814 when two British police officers intercepted letters from Daulat Rao Sindhia to the Rajah of Nepal hidden inside a book, 'dexterously concealed between the cover and the leaves which were pasted down on it', Governor-General Marquess Hastings

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<sup>22</sup> Thomas Sydenham to Earl of Minto, 17 Apr. 1808, Foreign Secret Department Records, no. 1, NAI, p. 37; Richard Jenkins to Thomas Hislop, 14 Nov. 1817, Grant-Duff Papers, Mss Eur F311/10, OIOC, p. 9; Henry Russell to the Marquess of Hastings, 22 Feb. 1818, Papers of John Briggs, MSS. Eng. hist. c. 332, Bodl. Oxf., p. 109.

<sup>23</sup> See notes dated 31 Aug. 1816, 17 Sept. 1816, 6 Dec. 1816, in Notes and intelligence of Mountstuart Elphinstone regarding the Peshawar and Trimbuckjee, Elphinstone Collection, Mss Eur F88/60, OIOC, np.

<sup>24</sup> Henry Russell to John Adam, 19 Nov. 1817, Papers of Mountstuart Elphinstone regarding the Nizam, Elphinstone Collection, Mss Eur F88/405, OIOC, p. 84; N.B. Edmonstone to Mountstuart Elphinstone, 4 Oct. 1804, Papers concerning the war with Holkar, HM, IOR/H/626, OIOC, p. 369; Thomas Sydenham to Marquess Wellesley, 15 Jun. 1805, Papers of Maj-Gen William Kirkpatrick, Mss Eur F228/76, OIOC, p. 62.

<sup>25</sup> William Palmer to Marquess Wellesley, 13 Oct. 1800, Correspondence of William Palmer, HM, IOR/H/576, OIOC, p. 434.

<sup>26</sup> Arthur Wellesley to Edward Frissell, 17 Feb. 1804, Arthur Wellesley Papers, Mss Eur E216, OIOC, p. 169; 165.



ordered these letters to be returned to Sindhia by the Resident ‘unopened and without explanation’ to signal the Company’s powers of surveillance. In Hastings’ words, ‘it will make him [Sindhia] believe he is closely watched, yet that we do not seek ground of criminating him’.<sup>27</sup> Here too, we see how letters in their physical form could be deployed to communicate messages distinct from the actual words inscribed on them.

The way intercepted letters were handled also illustrates how technical knowledge of Persianate conventions, acquired through Company patronage of Indian scribes, was put to practical use. Every detail was carefully considered for evidence of forgery, with special attention paid to format, seals, signatures, and superscriptions.<sup>28</sup> This is another context in which the practical importance of the Residency archives was made apparent. Residents carefully preserved letters from Indian rulers and dignitaries which were later used as models against which to examine suspected forgeries, confirming which intercepted letters carried authentic information and which did not. For instance, when the Resident at Hyderabad Thomas Sydenham received a suspicious letter from the Maratha chieftain Holkar, the handwriting and seal were compared with other letters in the Resident’s possession to test its authenticity; the Resident even compared the paper and the manner of enclosing and fastening it with a paper band.<sup>29</sup>

Despite differences in form and style, Indians and Britons shared certain fundamental similarities with regards to the nature and function of letters which facilitated this process. The materiality and format of letters would have spoken to their nineteenth-century recipients, whether British or Indian, in ways that would not be immediately obvious to us in the twenty-first century. As Giora Sternberg has pointed out, ‘early modern letters were not only a vehicle for narrated information, but also a formal social act, a statement by the addresser about his or her status relative to the addressee.’<sup>30</sup> Sternberg developed the concept of ‘epistolary ceremonial’ to encompass the many ways in which letter form signified status relationships between correspondents.<sup>31</sup> Thinking about letters in this way alerts us to terms of

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<sup>27</sup> Marchioness Bute, *The private journal of the Marquess of Hastings, J.G. Governor-General and Commander-in-Chief in India* (London, 1858), p. 216.

<sup>28</sup> N.B. Edmonstone to Earl of Minto, note to letter of 29 Jul. 1809, BC, IOR/F/4/311/7097, OIOC, p. 165-167; Richard Jenkins to John Adam, 25 Sept. 1818, BC, IOR/F/4/619/15425, OIOC, p. 173; Thomas Sydenham to N.B. Edmonstone, 23 Jan. 1809, Hyderabad Residency Records, series 35, file 29, NAI, p. 1; Richard Strachey to E.W. Blunt, 15 Aug. 1812, Richard Strachey Papers, Mss Eur D514/1, OIOC, p. 115.

<sup>29</sup> J. Monckton to N.B. Edmonstone, 4 Jun. 1807, Hyderabad Residency Records, box 2, vol. 34, NAI, p. 273-280.

<sup>30</sup> Giora Sternberg, ‘Epistolary ceremonial: Corresponding status at the time of Louis XIV’, *P&P*, 204 (2009): 36. See also Sue Walker, ‘The manners of the page: Prescription and practice in the visual organization of correspondence’, *Huntington Library Quarterly*, 66 (2003): 307-329.

<sup>31</sup> Sternberg, ‘Epistolary ceremonial’, p. 35. For the ways in which social stratification was reflected in the Persian *insha* tradition, see Momin Mohiuddin, *The chancellery and Persian epistolography under*

address, salutations, and modes of signing off which, alongside page layout and the size of quality of the paper, would have been imbued with meaning.

Residents were sensitized to prose as well as format. C.A. Bayly has observed how the flowery Persian of Indian royal letters was tied to fine gradations of rank, suggesting that literal-minded British officials, who omitted these verses in their records, missed the underlying messages they communicated.<sup>32</sup> While officials might have condensed their handwritten copies to facilitate fact-checking, often omitting the lengthy Arabic invocations and honorifics which prefaced royal letters, we should not assume that they were thus necessarily blind to the significance of epistolary etiquette. After all, the British elite had an equally sophisticated, though stylistically opposed, letter-writing culture; in Britain, as in India, there was an extensive body of prescriptive literature on the subject.<sup>33</sup> Similarly, as in India composition was accorded a central place in European diplomacy; nearly the entire second volume of Martens' classic diplomatic manual was devoted to the conventions appropriate to different kinds of letters, instructing readers on how to make written complaints, how to address memorials to sovereigns, and how to offer congratulations.<sup>34</sup>

Thus, while the specific formulae used in India might be unfamiliar, British officials were predisposed to give weight to details which we might dismiss as trivial. For instance, Charles Metcalfe contrasted the injustice of the Nizam Sikander Jah's refusal to embrace him in open court (which he termed 'the only ostensible Compliment paid by the Nizam to the British Representative') with his own willingness to adhere to the conventions governing their relationship, among which he numbered certain epistolary habits. 'In other respects generally the forms of Royalty are assumed by the Nizam, and admitted by the Resident', Metcalfe wrote. 'Such as the application of the Title Hoozoor I poor noor to His Highness. The placing of his designation at the top of any written communication, and not where the sense of the Text would require it, with other similar forms'.<sup>35</sup> The modes of address and salutation employed in letters were thus recognized to form part of an array of practises through which relationships were made manifest, alongside other forms of ceremonial like the exchange of

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*the Mughals* (Calcutta, 1971), p. 19; 66. For the ways in which status differentials were encoded in superscriptions and subscriptions during this period, as well as the 'semiotics of blank space', see Eve Tavor Bannet, *Empire of letters: Letter manuals and transatlantic correspondence, 1688-1820* (Cambridge, 2005), p. 64-69.

<sup>32</sup> Bayly, *Empire and information*, p. 77-78.

<sup>33</sup> Linda C. Mitchell, 'Letter-writing instruction manuals in seventeenth- and eighteenth-century England', in *Letter-writing manuals and instruction from antiquity to the present: Historical and bibliographic studies*, eds. Carol Poster and Linda C. Mitchell (Columbia, SC, 2007), p. 196. Martens wrote at length on the style and conventions of diplomatic letter-writing; see *Guide diplomatique*, p. 200. For a discussion of Persian *insha*, see Colin Mitchell, 'Safavid imperial *tarassul* and the Persian *insha* tradition', *Studia Iranica*, 26:2 (1997): 180-181.

<sup>34</sup> Martens, *Guide diplomatique*, vol. II, p. 318, 355, and 373, respectively.

<sup>35</sup> C. T. Metcalfe to George Swinton, 13 Feb. 1821, Papers of John Adam, Mss Eur F109/9, OIOC, np.

*khilat* and *nazr* (to be discussed in Chapter 3). Understanding the etiquette of letter-writing was considered just as important as knowing the protocol to be followed in open court.

At the same time as Residents were familiarising themselves with these Indian epistolary forms (with the guidance of their munshis, to be discussed in Chapter 4), Indians too were becoming acquainted with British modes of writing letters, and using this knowledge for their own purposes. At Delhi in 1811, a few enterprising courtiers succeeded in forging letters purporting to be from the chief justice in Calcutta. The letters, which were addressed to the Mughal Emperor Akbar Shah II, suggested that the Resident Archibald Seton's activities did not conform with Company policy. By casting doubt on Seton, these men undermined his influence at court, creating a vacuum to be filled with their own counsel and advice. The letters reflect the writers' cognizance of the English language and the conventions of British letter-writing. The secretary to government, on reviewing them, noted that the letters bore 'a subscription in the English character meant to appear as an English paper with an English superscription', where 'the imitations of the English signature are written by a person who could write bad English'. Beyond using English epistolary forms, the letters used the reputation and status of British information networks to their advantage as a means of encouraging the Emperor not to consult with anyone who might expose their plot: 'let no one else be privy to your Majesty's secrets, for I learned from Mr. Elphinstone [the Resident at Poona], that all your Majesty's servants are traitors, and very worthless.'<sup>36</sup> The Company's reliance on the circulation of letters meant that the whole system was potentially fragile and open to subversion; it presented an opportunity for people outside the Company to appropriate its authority for their own purposes by writing letters in the Company's name.

Recognizing this subversive potential, Residents were careful to orchestrate as much as possible the composition, transmission, and delivery of official letters. Dispatches from the Governor-General were invariably submitted to the ruler through the channel of the Resident, thereby enabling him to influence how the letter was received and understood, and by whom.<sup>37</sup> Although Thomas Sydenham at one point did make a copy of the Governor-General's address for the Nizam Sikander Jah's perusal, to give him 'an opportunity to examine, and comprehend, the nature, Tendency, and object of your Lordships Remonstrances and advice', Sydenham averred that this practice was the exception rather than the rule. 'On many occasions, I have declined furnishing the minister, or the Nizam, with copies of the Governor Generals Letters, in order that the contents of them might not become public amongst a Description of persons, who are ready to prepare the nizam for resistance

<sup>36</sup> C.T. Metcalfe to N.B. Edmonstone, 11 Jul. 1811, BC, IOR/F/4/393/1009, OIOC, p. 59-62.

<sup>37</sup> Mountstuart Elphinstone to Earl of Minto, 7 Jul. 1812, in *Poona records*, vol. XII, p. 224.

against every proposal from the British Government.<sup>38</sup> The information communicated in letters, as well as the way that information was phrased and presented, was liable to be used by ministers antipathetic to the Company in ways unintended by the author. Accordingly, the Resident consciously couched the messages conveyed by official letters in terms which left little room for misinterpretation.

For the Residents, the problem was thus not simply to collect and communicate intelligence, but to determine how best to present and use it. Taking a bird's-eye view of the Resident's routine business, it becomes apparent that letters were not simply vehicles for communicating facts; they could be used to cement legitimacy as well as to reinforce or subvert differentials in power and status. Because letters fulfilled a social as well as an informative function, a great deal of consideration was thus devoted, not simply to the circulation of letters, but also their composition, and, just as importantly, their mode of delivery.<sup>39</sup> Would the letter be handed over without comment? Would the Resident simply summarize the contents without allowing the ruler or minister to glance at the words on the page? Would the letter be offered briefly for examination and then reclaimed, or would the ruler be allowed to keep it? Would the exchange take place in open court or in private? The options had to be weighed carefully if the letter was to have its desired effect.

A few patterns seem to have emerged. For instance, points of policy were usually delivered in the form of a written memorandum, thereby ensuring that every detail was communicated with precision.<sup>40</sup> Reprimands or peremptory instructions were, at least initially, delivered verbally and in private out of delicacy to the ruler in question (though continued resistance to the Governor-General's commands might elicit a public reproach).<sup>41</sup> The 'delicacy' which Residents avowed to be their guiding principle in these circumstances was motivated by more than mere politeness; discretion could have strategic value. When the

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<sup>38</sup> Thomas Sydenham to Earl of Minto, Sept. 1809, BC, IOR/F/4/296/6833, OIOC, p. 78-79.

<sup>39</sup> Miles Ogborn makes a similar point about the use of royal letters by the seventeenth-century Company in *Indian ink*, p. 62.

<sup>40</sup> For instance, Elphinstone issued his complaints about the Peshwa's minister in the form of a written memorandum, as it 'might by a little misconstruction be so represented as to excited much alarm and jealousy in the Peshwa's mind'. Mountstuart Elphinstone to Earl of Minto, 7. Jul 1812, in *Poona records*, vol. XII, p. 224.

<sup>41</sup> When Richard Jenkins issued a memorandum to the Rajah of Berar he omitted in the Persian translation the Governor General's doubts about the Rajah's loyalty to the Company, which he thought 'it would be more delicate towards the Rajah as well as more consistent with propriety in other respects to confine Entirely to a verbal form.' Richard Jenkins to Marquess of Hastings, 12 May 1815, Correspondence regarding the Pindaris, HM, IOR/H/600, OIOC, p. 738. Meanwhile, Richard Strachey thought it best to prepare a paper on the Company's policy towards Bhopal. Richard Strachey to Marquess of Hastings, 13 May 1815, Correspondence regarding the Pindaris, HM, IOR/H/600, OIOC, p. 764.

Governor-General-in-Council sent a letter to the Nizam of Hyderabad Sikander Jah urging him to cease corresponding with the rebel Mohipat Ram, for example, the Resident Thomas Sydenham was advised to present the letter in private. 'By thus rendering the interposition of the British Government less apparent,' it was thought, 'His Highness would be enabled to adopt the course of conduct recommended to him with more credit and dignity than if the compulsory motives of it were publicly exposed.'<sup>42</sup> Handling these points of contention privately was believed to facilitate cooperation, since it allowed the ruler in question to cede to the Company's demands without losing face in the eyes of the court.

Try as he might, however, the Resident was sometimes flummoxed in his efforts to control the wider reception of letters, particularly given that the receipt of important dispatches usually occasioned a public, ceremonial event. Under these conditions, hamstrung by courtly etiquette, the Resident could do little to control the ruler's behaviour, while the ruler, for his part, could exploit the opportunity to create general impressions among the public about the import of the letters being delivered. One instance of this occurred at Lucknow in 1816, when the Nawab Vizier Ghazi-ud-din Haidar Khan was in the process of appealing to the Governor-General for control of his deceased step-mother's property in Faizabad. When the Nawab received an official letter from the Marquess of Hastings ratifying, in no uncertain terms, the Resident's earlier denial of the Nawab's claim to the begum's vast wealth, the Resident Richard Strachey was unsettled to witness how the news was handled. Rather than expressing his disappointment or resentment, as Strachey had perhaps expected, the Nawab instead made a public display of his satisfaction by honoring, with ceremonial robes, the person who had delivered the dispatch as well as the munshi who had transcribed the original letter to the Governor-General. According to the bewildered Resident,

public rejoicings also took place, and His Excellency's satisfaction has been so unequivocally manifested that I cannot but believe his Excellency to have countenanced the report which has gained universal Currency, that he has received the Authority of the Governor General to the fullest extent of his wishes regarding Fyzabad.<sup>43</sup>

By handling the letter publicly in the way that he did, the Nawab Vizier negated, to some extent, the message it contained and the intention with which it was dispatched. Through public celebration, the Nawab Vizier cultivated the impression that his claim was condoned by the begum's executors, an impression which gave an aura of legitimacy to his subsequent seizure of the begum's household in Faizabad. The Resident might do everything in his

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<sup>42</sup> N.B. Edmonstone to Thomas Sydenham, 23 Oct. 1806, Hyderabad Residency Records, box 2, vol. 33, NAI, p. 359-360.

<sup>43</sup> Richard Strachey to John Adam, 21 Mar. 1816, Richard Strachey Papers, Mss Eur D514/3, OIOC, p. 132.

power to orchestrate, to the smallest degree, the communications between Calcutta and the court, but the marks on the page sometimes meant very little in practice.

As this example suggests, while Residents could exert some control over the letters traversing the subcontinent, news passed by word of mouth sometimes proved more ungovernable. James Achilles Kirkpatrick remarked once in Mountstuart Elphinstone's hearing that 'the secrets of govt are so ill kept that the resolutions of govt about the French here were known to Gardner an officer in the Nizam's service before they were known to the resident.'<sup>44</sup> Tellingly, when the minister of Travancore was requested to write a letter to the Governor General expressing his willingness to cooperate with the Company, the minister refused on the grounds 'that in less than Three Days the contents would circulate through every corner of the Country'.<sup>45</sup> As the import of official letters spread through conversation and debate, their intended meanings could be lost or superseded. Meanwhile, Residents struggled to decide when to commit conversations to paper; while technical knowledge could be applied to evaluate the authenticity of intercepted letters, verbal assertions were sometimes less amenable to truth-testing. The following section will examine how the Residents negotiated this interface between oral and written culture; how they were impacted by information transmitted orally, as well as how they endeavoured to wrest control over public opinion out of the hands of their Indian opponents.

## **2. The power of rumour, or, 'the tattle in the suburbs of the city'**

Rumour is a concept which social theorists have found difficult to define succinctly despite its prevalence in everyday usage. Traditionally rumour carries a pejorative connotation; early analyses of the phenomenon identified untruth as its essential feature, and were concerned primarily with detecting and understanding patterns of distortion.<sup>46</sup> Yet, as social science studies from the 1960s onwards became increasingly sensitized to the conditions in which rumours emerge, anthropologists and sociologists have emphasized the practical importance of rumour as a way for people to pool resources and give meaning to ambiguous situations. In his classic analysis, sociologist Tamotsu Shibutani illustrated how rumours are developed deliberately and collaboratively in situations where the news provided by institutional channels is lacking or unsatisfactory.<sup>47</sup> Considering these insights, historian Luise White, based on her reading of vampire stories circulating in colonial and

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<sup>44</sup> 25 Aug. 1801, Journal of Mountstuart Elphinstone, Elphinstone Collection, Mss Eur F88/368, OIOC, p. 94.

<sup>45</sup> Colin Macaulay to Earl of Minto, 16 Sept. 1808, Correspondence regarding the rebellious activities of the Dewan of Travancore, HM, IOR/H/589, p. 395-6.

<sup>46</sup> Gordon W. Allport and Leo Postman, *The psychology of rumor* (New York, NY, 1947), p. 134.

<sup>47</sup> Tamotsu Shibutani, *Improvised news: A sociological study of rumor* (Indianapolis, IN, 1966), p. 17.

postcolonial Africa, has suggested that we think of rumour differently, 'not [as] events misinterpreted and deformed, but rather events analyzed and commented upon'.<sup>48</sup> Like Shibutani, White sees rumour as a sign of a critically engaged public actively seeking to make sense of their world and stake their place in the political discourse of the day. Similarly, based on his fieldwork in Haiti anthropologist Glen Perice has suggested that rumour, as a form of unauthorized speech, can be a way of taking action and registering opposition, albeit without publicly resisting oppressive regimes; these findings reflect, in moderated form, James Scott's famous depiction of gossip as a symbolic 'weapon of the weak'.<sup>49</sup>

Many of these observations about rumour would seem to be applicable to the Indian context. In Indian society news and conjecture proliferated swiftly, passed through word of mouth at mosques, markets, pilgrimage sites, and army encampments; this was the sphere of political discussion and debate which C.A. Bayly dubbed the Indian ecumene.<sup>50</sup> Oral culture of this type was important before the advent of print, and in a context where illiteracy was widespread, but it acquired additional significance given British attempts to stamp out Indian channels of communication. However resilient their networks might be, the Indian elite were still painfully conscious of the Company's endeavours to keep them in the dark, and speculated about what the Resident might be trying to keep from them. The Resident's inability to comment on or confirm Indian sources intensified these suspicions. James Achilles Kirkpatrick was constantly harangued by the Nizam Ali Khan and his ministers for what they perceived to be a failure on his part to pass along crucial information about the progress of a reported Afghan invasion of north India. As Kirkpatrick himself put it in a letter to his brother William in February 1799, 'Edmonstone and his Deputy in Calcutta have discontinued for sometime past sending me the Delhi Papers, which frequently places me in an awkward predicament'. The minister seems to have suspected that Kirkpatrick was being disingenuous, and, in hopes of drawing him out, presented the Resident with letters from his own informants abroad, the contents of which Kirkpatrick was unable to either confirm or contradict until he finally received news from Calcutta on the subject.<sup>51</sup> This atmosphere of mistrust combined with the slow pace of official communications from Calcutta meant that

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<sup>48</sup> Luise White, *Speaking with vampires: Rumor and history in colonial Africa* (Berkeley, CA, 2000), p. 58.

<sup>49</sup> Glen A. Perice, 'Rumors and politics in Haiti', *Anthropological Quarterly*, 70:1 (1997): 1-10; James C. Scott, *Weapons of the weak: Everyday forms of peasant resistance* (New Haven, CT, 1985), p. 282.

<sup>50</sup> Bayly, *Empire and information*, p. 82.

<sup>51</sup> J.A. Kirkpatrick to William Kirkpatrick, 3 Feb. 1799, Private and demi-official correspondence, Papers of Maj-Gen William Kirkpatrick, Mss Eur F228/1, OIOC, p. 59.

rumours were taken very seriously at Indian courts, where the general public as well as the political elite were keen to discover the Company's intentions.<sup>52</sup>

British commentators generally made light of what they considered an Indian predisposition towards gossip; Indian news-writers were condemned for giving any weight whatsoever to the talk of the town. Thomas Williamson's popular handbook *The East India Vade-Mecum* reflected popular British opinion when it disparagingly described the contents of the *akbharat* as 'the mere tattle in the suburbs of a city'.<sup>53</sup> Residents were leery about forwarding this kind of news to the central government, fearing that it would bring their personal credit, that is, their reputation for truthfulness and accuracy, into question. In the eighteenth century, personal credit, as Margot Finn has illustrated, operated as 'a broader social and cultural measure of personal worth'.<sup>54</sup> In the interests of caution, Residents were careful to preserve their credit by couching their information with phrases like 'my information adds' or 'I have heard through confidential channels' or 'it is said'. Only rarely did Residents communicate these kinds of rumours with confidence, and then only when the opinion of the court was unanimous. For instance, on the eve of the Third Maratha War, Richard Jenkins laid out several points of mutually reinforcing intelligence which substantiated his theory that the Rajah of Berar was conspiring with Sindhia to turn against the Company. He concluded: 'the principal circumstances above mentioned [that the Rajah is corresponding secretly with Sindia] I hear from so many quarters that I cannot doubt their correctness and I am constantly receiving warnings from the principal persons in our interest in the Durbar.'<sup>55</sup>

The Residents' circumspection about forwarding information acquired through word of mouth was due in large part to the misinformation that was purposefully and industriously spread by rival Indian powers, who thereby hoped to confuse and misdirect Company policy, as well as to rally support among the general population. The rumours spread by the Company's enemies generally involved exaggerations concerning the number and movement of Indian troops, or the formation of hostile coalitions. Richard Jenkins, carefully monitoring the Rajah of Berar's troops for signs of incipient attack, made note of 'false reports propagated regarding Pindarries, which are made the instruments of exciting alarm, and the

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<sup>52</sup> The movement of troops was particularly subject to speculation. See for example Richard Jenkins to Marquess of Hastings, 11 Dec. 1814, Correspondence regarding the Pindaris, HM, IOR/H/599, OIOC, p. 462, on the speculation excited by the advance of Colonel Doveton's force to Ellichpoor.

<sup>53</sup> Williamson, *East India Vade-Mecum*, vol. II, p. 471-472.

<sup>54</sup> Margot Finn, *The character of credit: Personal debt in English culture, 1740-1914* (Cambridge, 2003), p. 19.

<sup>55</sup> Richard Jenkins to Thomas Hislop, 14 Nov. 1817, Copies of letters from Richard Jenkins, Grant-Duff Papers, Mss Eur F311/10, OIOC, p. 10.



pretence of keeping the Rajah's troops in a continued state of readiness for movement'.<sup>56</sup> Meanwhile, the Maratha chieftain Holkar's agents regularly spread word of his planned assaults against the Company, attacks which in fact rarely materialized. In the Company's view, these rumours were used as 'an instrument for the support of his consequence, and the maintenance of his military reputation and political ascendancy', and spread 'through the industry of those who have an interest in reviving scenes of turbulence and disorder'.<sup>57</sup> As this suggests, officials were liable to attribute rumours of budding resistance to an unrepresentative minority of troublemakers.<sup>58</sup> In consequence, when Archibald Seton alerted the Governor-General to rumours of a potential alliance spearheaded by Holkar, the report was dubbed 'absurd', and Seton was warned against relying too heavily on 'the credit of common Newspapers', or on his Indian informant, who was deemed to be a willing instrument in the hands of the Maratha chiefs.<sup>59</sup> In cases like these, where rumours had destabilizing implications, British officials were generally slow to give credence to them, mistrusting the motives of their Indian sources and preferring instead to maintain the status quo. John Malcolm advised prospective members of the political line that given the unsettled condition of central India, 'intrigues, treasonable conversations and papers, and immature plots, must for some time be matters of frequent occurrence and growth, but such will in general be best left to perish of neglect.'<sup>60</sup>

Company officials were also wary of rumours because there was a recognized possibility that in appearing to take notice of gossip Residents might unintentionally give credence to it; given the powerful mutual distrust that so often existed between the Resident and the Indian political elite, vigorously attempting to quell a rumour could be interpreted as a confirmation of its truth. An incident at Hyderabad illustrates this principle at work. In the year 1808 the Resident Thomas Sydenham decided to host an entertainment for the Nizam Sikander Jah as a gesture of good will, an invitation which the Nizam refused despite having previously shown signs of eagerly anticipating the party. Eventually Sydenham traced the

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<sup>56</sup> Richard Jenkins to Thomas Hislop, 24 Nov. 1817, Copies of letters from Richard Jenkins, Grant-Duff Papers, Mss Eur F311/10, OIOC, p. 14. Richard Jenkins also suspected that the Rajah of Berar used the occasion of Marquess of Hastings's tour of the upper provinces to sow rumours about an impending war and to spur the Maratha chiefs to unite against the Company. Richard Jenkins to Marquess of Hastings, 26 Sept. 1814, Correspondence regarding the Pindaris, HM, IOR/H/599, OIOC, p. 21-22.

<sup>57</sup> N.B. Edmonstone to W.C. Bentinck, 21 Oct. 1806, Hyderabad Residency Records, box 2, vol. 33, NAI, p. 328-329.

<sup>58</sup> Anand A. Yang, 'A conversation of rumors: The language of popular "mentalités" in late nineteenth-century colonial India', *Journal of Social History*, 20:3 (1987): 488.

<sup>59</sup> N.B. Edmonstone to Archibald Seton, 26 Feb. 1807, BC, IOR/F/4/216/4753, OIOC, p. 7-8. Mountstuart Elphinstone was similarly warned against taking 'idle rumours' about Holkar too seriously. N.B. Edmonstone to Mountstuart Elphinstone, 22 Dec. 1804, *Nagpur records*, vol. 1, p. 164.

<sup>60</sup> John Malcolm, 'Notes of instruction', in Briggs, *Letters*, p. 208-9.

Nizam's uneasiness to a rumour that the Company was planning on violently deposing him and replacing him with his brother. One would assume that the most straightforward solution would be for Sydenham to confront the gossip head-on, but Sydenham was reluctant to address the problem so candidly, afraid of exciting the suspicions of the Nizam.<sup>61</sup> 'If I had urged the Nizam to perform his promise his suspicions would have increased with the Earnestness of my manner. On the other Hand if I permitted the Nizam to decline my Invitation, I should have encouraged the belief of the Truth of the Report.'<sup>62</sup> Sydenham ultimately resorted to rumour himself. In his replies to various 'Indirect Enquiries', Sydenham 'treated the Nizam's Fears with ridicule and expressed my compassion only that his Highness should seriously entertain such unmanly and absurd suspicions'.<sup>63</sup> H.T. Colebrooke, while at Nagpur, took a similar line with respect to rumours circulating among the Rajah's servants about preparations for a secret journey to Poona; Colebrooke decided to avoid questioning the Rajah and his ministers directly, 'lest it should seem to indicate a jealousy of the Raja's connections with Poona, but I directed my Moonshee to enquire indirectly from Sridhar Pundit.'<sup>64</sup> Colebrooke's successor at Nagpur, Elphinstone, was likewise loath to make direct enquiries, 'unless they are necessary and likely to be attended with good effect because they excite jealousy'.<sup>65</sup> By addressing a rumour directly Residents were at risk of exacerbating the suspicions and resentments which had given rise to it in the first place; in these instances, particularly where the rumour was unlikely to have implications beyond the court, it was usually best for Residents to simply wait for the rumour to die out of its own accord.

In an effort not to betray their mutual suspicions, then, both Britons and Indians often preferred to engage in oblique and circuitous tactics when it came to addressing and validating rumours. How this sometimes tortuous negotiation might have worked is suggested to us by an account of Richard Jenkins, Elphinstone's successor at the court of Nagpur. Jenkins described with contempt the Rajah Raghoji Bhonsla's policy of 'using every endeavor to procure the most particular intelligence respecting our designs and the movement of our troops,' noting that 'on one occasion his alarm was excited by a report from a person sent to Hyderabad to purchase Elephants' as well as by agents 'of still more despicable description'.<sup>66</sup> Having received a report which warned him of the Company's plans to go war against the Marathas, the Rajah forwarded the information to Jenkins without comment.

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<sup>61</sup> Thomas Sydenham to Earl of Minto, 28 August 1808, BC, IOR/F/4/926/6833, OIOC, p. 33.

<sup>62</sup> Ibid.

<sup>63</sup> Ibid., p. 36.

<sup>64</sup> H.T. Colebrooke to Marquess Wellesley, 24 Sept. 1799, in *Nagpur records*, vol. I, p. 13.

<sup>65</sup> Mountstuart Elphinstone to Arthur Wellesley, 4 Feb. 1804, in *Nagpur records*, vol. I, p. 19.

<sup>66</sup> Richard Jenkins to Marquess of Hastings, 16 Apr. 1815, Correspondence regarding the Pindaris, HM, IOR/H/600, OIOC, p. 717; 720.

Unsure how to interpret the Rajah's motive in so doing, Jenkins chose to treat the rumour with condescension, remarking that the Company's goodwill towards the Rajah 'was too well established to render it necessary for me to give importance to such insignificant rumours by making any further remark'.<sup>67</sup> When another report about an impending Company attack was carried to the Resident via messenger, however, Jenkins sent his munshi to the Rajah to assure him 'that there was no ground for the report which I should not have noticed had I not thought it would appear disrespectful to disregard a communication directly from His Highness through whatever channel conveyed'.<sup>68</sup> To this the Rajah simply replied 'that he had mentioned the subject merely to shew that he did not wish to have any concealments, and that he relied perfectly on the friendship of the British Government'.<sup>69</sup> Both Residents and rulers were thus to some extent guilty of perpetuating suspicion and misunderstanding in their desire to preserve stable relations and avoid confrontation.

When rumours were true, however, Residents were sometimes forced to acknowledge them more unequivocally, even when they might have preferred not to, to maintain a show of good faith. William Palmer purposefully avoided informing the Poona court of his recall, worried that it would undermine the authority which remained to him until the arrival of his successor. Not wanting to disrupt the business then underway, Palmer chose to remain silent. Eventually, however, 'the Event being known to many of the principal Inhabitants of this Town by intelligence from various Quarters I judged it necessary to obviate the suspicions which the Peshwa might entertain of motives unfavourable to him if an appearance of Concealment should be countenanced'.<sup>70</sup> While in some cases it served the Resident's interests to keep information from the ruler and his ministers, he did so at the risk of damaging the Company's credit at court; generally that risk was too great to hazard, however embarrassing the information in question might be. For credit, as de Wicquefort observed, was the political representative's most valuable commodity, 'the Foundation of all the Commerce that passes among Men, of what Nature soever it may be'.<sup>71</sup>

Moreover, although Residents generally preferred not to officially acknowledge rumours relating to factional politics, opting to rise above 'the Intrigues and Squabbles of the Court', this is not to say that these rumours were practically insignificant.<sup>72</sup> Whispers issuing

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<sup>67</sup> Ibid., p. 720.

<sup>68</sup> Ibid., p. 721-722.

<sup>69</sup> Ibid., p. 722-723.

<sup>70</sup> William Palmer to Marquess Wellesley, 6 Sept. 1800, Correspondence of William Palmer, HM, IOR/H/576, OIOC, p. 324-325.

<sup>71</sup> Wicquefort, *The ambassador and his functions*, p. 333; see also Martens, *Guide diplomatique*, p. 121; de Callières, *The art of diplomacy*, p. 152.

<sup>72</sup> Henry Russell to Charles Russell, 24 May 1810, Russell Papers, MSS Eng. lett. d. 151, Bodl. Oxf., p. 84.

from hostile quarters could corrode the Resident's political agenda over time, attenuating his connections to key players and his ability to mobilize them in pursuit of Company objectives. For instance, in 1822 Charles Metcalfe discovered that a party hostile to him, as part of a general attempt to undermine his proceedings at Hyderabad, had succeeded in persuading the minister Chandu Lal that Metcalfe intended to remove him from office. In consequence of this information, which Chandu Lal described vaguely as originating in 'the neighbourhood of the Residency', the minister ceased confiding in Metcalfe and instead tried to sidestep the Resident by corresponding directly with the Governor-General without Metcalfe's knowledge. Chandu Lal later justified his actions to Metcalfe by reasoning 'that he had been extremely alarmed by reports of Intrigues at the Court for his overthrow', an alarm compounded by Metcalfe's 'reserve and distrust towards him'. Metcalfe himself had long been aware of these rumours, but admitted that he had done nothing to dispel them, not anticipating the degree to which Chandu Lal would be swayed by 'such imaginary fears'.<sup>73</sup> Yet in an environment of instability and change fears are quick to take root and, as the activities of Chandu Lal make plain, fear can be a powerful spur to action, prompting individuals to take decisive measures in their own defence. The scholarship on rumour has illustrated time and again that rumour, fear, and collective tension are mutually reinforcing; where alarm and apprehension are acute, rumours can trigger dramatic reactions.<sup>74</sup>

The performative power of rumours is perhaps most forcefully illustrated by a violent confrontation which broke out between British soldiers and local inhabitants of Poona in 1809. In this instance, several soldiers on leave were assaulted on the street because of rumours that British construction workers, charged with building the Peshwa a palace in the English style, were seizing, murdering, and burying local women and children under the palace's foundations. Hamilton, the Acting Resident, conceded that he had been aware of the rumour, but had not saw fit to communicate it to Government: 'this report came first accidentally to my ears about five days ago, and I thought the most likely way to bring it into discredit, as far as my influence went, was to treat it with contempt or ridicule.' In the wake of the confrontation, however, the Resident demanded that the royal ministers 'supress reports so injurious to the English name (although in themselves so incredibly absurd) and find out and punish the authors of them.' Hamilton expressed, moreover, 'the conviction that they [the

<sup>73</sup> C.T. Metcalfe to George Swinton, 3 Sept. 1822, Papers of John Adam, Mss Eur F109/9, OIOC, np.

<sup>74</sup> Rumours are generally said to flourish in conditions of disaster, social unrest, and war. See Shibutani, *Improvised news*, p. 32 and p. 46; Ralph L. Rosnow and Gary Alan Fine, *Rumor and gossip: the social psychology of hearsay* (New York, NY, 1976), p. 62. For historical illustrations of this phenomenon, see Georges Lefebvre, *The great fear of 1789: Rural panic in revolutionary France*, trans. Joan White (Princeton, NJ, 1983), p. 210-211 or Arlette Farge and Jacques Revel, *The vanishing children of Paris: Rumor and politics before the French Revolution*, trans. Claudia Miéville (Cambridge, MA, 1991), p. 10.

rumours] were fabricated and circulated by enemies of the two Governments for the express purpose of disturbing the existing harmony.’<sup>75</sup> Subsequently, the English soldiers’ movements were restricted to the cantonment for fear of further attacks.<sup>76</sup> This account, if the interpretation of the Resident is to be believed, would appear to suggest the danger of ignoring rumours and allowing them to circulate unobstructed; it would imply that Residents were required to take action to suppress narratives which worked against the Company’s interests, and to present a powerful counter-narrative favourable to the Company’s image.<sup>77</sup>

In line with this philosophy, following violent incidents of any kind the Residents were quick to make public announcements to stop the spread of rumours which might incite the local population to protest. While political gossip or rumours relating to military movements had to be treated with caution since attending to them could entail broader shifts in government policy and military strategy, anything which might ignite popular fears or resentments was promptly counteracted with a public statement. When a labourer died on the road after being knocked down by a British officer on horseback, apparently by accident, the Resident Henry Russell immediately issued statements ‘to prevent unpleasant reports from getting abroad’.<sup>78</sup> Following a violent confrontation at Delhi between Muslims and Hindus, Archibald Seton wrote dispatches to the other Residencies informing them of his version of events, explaining his letter as an attempt to stem ‘the exaggeration and misrepresentation which generally attend the diffusion of intelligence regarding any incidental disturbance within the limits of the Company’s dominions.’<sup>79</sup> It was for this reason too that following the mutiny at Vellore in 1807 the Governor-General issued immediate reports to the Residents, assuring them ‘that the disturbance has been merely local and that is ceased with the recapture of the fort and the destruction of the insurgents’, urging them to ‘counteract any reports which may prevail inconsistent with the real facts’; apparently, the uprising in Travancore in 1809 was inspired, at least in part, by precisely such incendiary rumours about events at Vellore.<sup>80</sup> As Ranajit Guha has observed, rumour often played a significant role in mobilizing popular resistance to the Company by feeding into widespread hopes and fears.<sup>81</sup> British officials were

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<sup>75</sup> William Hamilton to Barry Close, 30 Oct. 1809, in *Poona records*, vol. VII, p. 421-422.

<sup>76</sup> Henry Russell to Lt. Col. Lawrence, 18 Nov. 1809, in *Poona records*, vol. VII, p. 433.

<sup>77</sup> A further example of the performative power of rumours at Indian courts is the dismissal of the Peshwa’s intermediary with the British, Gopal Rao Munshi, his brother and son, who were accused of collaborating with Holkar to depose the Peshwa. Barry Close to Marquess Wellesley, 3 Jul. 1802, in *Poona records*, vol. X, p. 15.

<sup>78</sup> Henry Russell to N.B. Edmonstone, 11 Aug. 1810, in *Poona records*, vol. VII, p. 483-484.

<sup>79</sup> Letter forwarded by N.B. Edmonstone to Thomas Sydenham, 21 May 1807, Hyderabad Residency Records, box 2, vol. 34, NAI, p. 237-238.

<sup>80</sup> Quote from N.B. Edmonstone to Mountstuart Elphinstone, 27 Jul. 1806, in *Nagpur records*, vol. I, p. 6; For events in Travancore, see Court of Directors to Governor-in-Council Fort St George, 29 Sept. 1809, General Correspondence with India, IOR/E/4/904, OIOC, p. 346-347.

<sup>81</sup> Ranajit Guha, *Elementary aspects of peasant insurgency in colonial India* (Delhi, 1983), p. 256.

keenly aware of this pattern. As Charles Metcalfe phrased it, ‘the Intelligence of disaster spreads like wildfire, and immediately excites the hopes and speculations of the Millions whom we hold in subjugation.’<sup>82</sup> Residents recognized that rumoured attacks on Company rule elsewhere in the subcontinent, whether in the form of urban riots or organized military campaigns, could undermine impressions of British inviolability and tempt resentful Indian rulers to contribute to the barrage.

Much of the Residents’ time and effort was thus expended in combatting unfavourable rumours, and many of them mobilized their epistolary networks for that purpose. Mountstuart Elphinstone repeatedly thanked his friend John Adam for forwarding him information which allowed him to undermine false reports at Nagpur. For instance, Adam’s information contradicted rumours of the Company’s defeat at the hands of Holkar, which, Elphinstone explained, ‘has been talked of here with perfect confidence & mentioned to me as a certainty’.<sup>83</sup> A few weeks later, Elphinstone had further reason to thank Adam, admitting that ‘I really am obliged to you for your regular intelligence which enables me to refute many falsehoods which I should have otherwise been obliged to have suffered & to despise reports which I might have believed.’<sup>84</sup> Indeed, Elphinstone worried that rumours like these might incite the Raja to abandon his stated neutrality and throw his support behind Holkar; Elphinstone blamed this tenuous state of affairs on ‘the circumstance of his vakeels having a charge of horse in Holkar’s army and consequently being inclined to trumpet his successes & suppress his defeats but the want of news is made up in inventions & Gen Lakes meets with checks & [loss] almost without number.’<sup>85</sup> The following year Thomas Sydenham, acting Resident at Poona, was similarly engaged in attempting to root out the sources of reports ‘injurious to the British Government’. Again, the enemies of the British Government were accused of purposefully spreading ‘the most absurd and extravagant reports of the strength, resources, success and intentions of Holkar and his adherents’.<sup>86</sup> The Company, then, had not only to defeat Indian forces in the battle field, but to ensure that accurate representations of these victories were communicated to rival courts. The Company sought to conjure up an aura of martial supremacy which would encourage political stability in India by precluding regional powers, through intimidation, from attempting to unseat them.

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<sup>82</sup> C.T. Metcalfe, Notes on Burman War, Letters from Sir Chares Theophilus Metcalfe to Amherst, Amherst Papers, Mss Eur F140/93, OIOC, np.

<sup>83</sup> Mountstuart Elphinstone to John Adam, 12 Nov. 1804, John Adam Papers, Mss Eur F109/88, OIOC, np.

<sup>84</sup> Mountstuart Elphinstone to John Adam, 2 Dec. 1804, John Adam Papers, Mss Eur F109/88, OIOC, np.

<sup>85</sup> Mountstuart Elphinstone to John Adam, 20 Mar. 1805, John Adam Papers, Mss Eur F109/89, OIOC, np.

<sup>86</sup> Thomas Sydenham to Marquess Wellesley, 15 Jun. 1805, in *Poona records*, vol. VII, p. 253.

Alternately, news of the Company's successes could act as a convincing disincentive for resistance; in this case the connections between courts could work in the Company's favour. Following his successful repression of a revolt at Hyderabad, Henry Russell observed with pleasure that news of the Nizam's surrender of his two rebellious sons had encouraged the Peshwa to submit to the Resident's demands to put his own minister into Company custody. Russell also quoted letters from Richard Jenkins at Nagpur which suggested that there too events at Poona and Hyderabad were taken as a warning against pushing the Company too far.<sup>87</sup> As Ann Stoler has observed with respect to gossip circulating in nineteenth-century Indonesia, 'rumor was a highly ambiguous discursive field: it controlled some people, terrorized others; it was damning and enabling, shoring up colonial rule and subverting it at the same time.'<sup>88</sup> Rumour could help perpetuate an atmosphere of fear, persuading Indian rulers to accede to the Residents' demands.

It was this slippery, polyvalent quality of rumour that the Residents had to try to control and mobilize for their own interests. Rumour was a pervasive feature of Indian courtly society, connected, it would seem, with the generalised sense of anxiety and suspicion resulting from the Company's policy of subordinate isolation. Residents often mistrusted these rumours, and not without reason; rival factions used them as a resource to destabilize and mislead the Company, and by reacting too forcefully the Resident risked playing into his rivals' hands. Still, rumours had to be considered with care; while courtly gossip was often best ignored, some rumours carried incendiary implications and could produce destructive consequences, whether in the form of street brawls or rebellions. In these instances, the Residents were responsible for countering with their own representations of events, whether of violent incidents in the streets or pitched battles on the field of combat. Publicizing the Company's victories in this way was understood as a powerful intimidation tactic, a way of making the flow of information within and between courts work for the Company. To do all this effectively, however, Residents were reliant on the proper functioning of the Company's networks, upon which their legitimacy and status as a Company representative equally depended. Yet, Residents were often frustrated to discover that it was within the Company itself where information tended to fall through the cracks, and where doubt and distrust were generated. The remainder of this chapter will consider how information circulated, or failed to circulate, within the Company's political line, beginning with the disputed relationship between private and public correspondence.

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<sup>87</sup> Henry Russell to his father, 22 Oct. 1815, Russell Papers, MS. Eng. lett. c. 151, Bodl. Oxf., p. 146.

<sup>88</sup> Ann Laura Stoler, 'In cold blood: Hierarchies of credibility and the politics of colonial narratives', *Representations*, 37 (1992): 151-189.

### 3. Between private disclosures and public avowals

In the late eighteenth and early nineteenth century, ‘private’ and ‘public’ were contested categories whose boundaries were shifting and pliable. Given the pervasiveness of patronage, ties of personal and occupational affiliation tended to overlap; appointments to the Company depended on nomination from the Court of Directors, meaning that most employees were connected in one way or another through ties of blood or friendship. The concept of ‘friendship’ itself (a generic term which encompassed people connected through kinship, sentiment, occupation, politics, and all manner of other attachments) was defined largely by reciprocal services.<sup>89</sup> This imbrication of public and private was reflected in contemporary epistolary practice, through which enterprising individuals in the eighteenth century mobilized friends and kin, often in the interests of advancing their careers.<sup>90</sup> Historians have argued that eighteenth-century correspondence cannot be neatly categorized as ‘private’ or ‘public’ at all; Clare Brant has suggested abandoning the concept of ‘private’ letters altogether, arguing that the term ‘is simply inaccurate for many eighteenth-century familiar letters, which were composed in company, voluntarily circulated beyond the addressee, and frequently found their way into print.’<sup>91</sup> Yet, few studies of eighteenth-century letters actually explore public/private as categories of practice as well as analysis, or examine the consequences of that distinction on a pragmatic level.<sup>92</sup> For the Residents, at least, the existence of two overlapping epistolary traditions, a public and a private, posed definite possibilities (and perils).

Rather than constituting two distinct categories, ‘public’ and ‘private’ (at least as they applied to the Residents’ letter-writing practices) are perhaps most usefully envisioned as existing on either end of a spectrum. On one extreme were official dispatches, usually transcribed neatly on large sheets of paper, written formally and clearly. On the other extreme

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<sup>89</sup> On friendship and patronage, see Harold Perkin, *The origins of modern English society 1780-1880* (London, 1969), p. 44-50. See also Naomi Tadmor, *Family and friends in eighteenth-century England: Household, kinship, and patronage* (Cambridge, 2001), p. 167; 212-213.

<sup>90</sup> For examples from different professions, see Alison Duncan, ‘The sword and the pen: The role of correspondence in the advancement tactics of eighteenth-century military officers’, *Journal of Scottish Historical Studies*, 29:2 (2009): 106-122; Ellen Gill, ‘“Children of the service”: Paternalism, patronage and friendship in the Georgian navy’, *Journal for Maritime Research*, 15:2 (2013): 149-165; Pat Hudson, ‘Correspondence and commitment: British traders’ letters in the long eighteenth century’, *Cultural and Social History*, 11:4 (2014): 527-33.

<sup>91</sup> Clare Brant, *Eighteenth-century letters and British culture* (Houndmills, Basingstoke, 2006), p. 5.

<sup>92</sup> For this distinction see Jeff Weintraub, ‘The theory and politics of the public/private distinction’, in *Public and private in thought and practice: Perspectives on a grand dichotomy*, ed. Jeff Weintraub and Krishan Kumar (Chicago, IL, 1997). In a transatlantic context, Eve Tavor Bannet explores apparently widespread practices of ‘secret writing’ (designed to convey intelligence selectively through cyphers or codes) and the resultant relationship between what she terms ‘public and hidden transcripts’ in *Empire of letters*, p. 229-273.



were personal epistles, scrawled messily on scraps of paper, written in intimate tones relating matters of interest only to the author and a small circle of friends and kin; in the language of the day these were usually termed ‘familiar letters’.<sup>93</sup> Given the Residents’ remote situation, familiar letters were imbued with profound emotional significance. Reacting to his appointment to the Residency at Nagpur, Elphinstone admitted to his close friend Edward Strachey (then Assistant Resident at Poona) that ‘I dread being stationed long at a place where I shall be so solitary’, begging Strachey to ‘write me often and long in prose and verse, and have compassion on me now that I am *door ooftadeh* [outcast].’ As a counterpoint to the dry Company correspondence piling up on his desk, Elphinstone requested ‘long, frequent, open, wild, sentimental letters, with occasional peeps down the very abyss of your heart’.<sup>94</sup> In the longer term, letters like these furnished Elphinstone with an avenue to his past life, which, as David A. Gerber has observed in his study of emigrant letter-writers in North America, was a crucial factor in helping dislocated individuals to sustain a sense of personal history and of self.<sup>95</sup> Elphinstone regularly re-read old letters and journals, which, he explained, allowed him to ‘recall not only the occurrences but the opinions & sensations of past times’.<sup>96</sup> Through these exchanges, the Residents were able to stake out a personal life separate from their professional lives as Company officials. Accordingly, Residents sometimes made a conscious effort to avoid writing too extensively about work, even in their letters to friends in the political line. ‘Enough’, Metcalfe concluded after a long paragraph deploring the policies of his predecessor in office, ‘this letter begins to smell of the shop.’<sup>97</sup>

Familiar letters could also provide a welcome venue for informal conversation, as well as a cathartic outlet for feelings and opinions which might otherwise have remained painfully pent up. James Achilles Kirkpatrick certainly viewed his letters to his brothers as an outlet for sorrows and resentments which could not easily be voiced in the company of his household, who were his inferiors in rank. After being rebuked by his brother for complaining about a colleague, Kirkpatrick protested ‘my dear Will if I do not unbosom myself to you, and lay open to you all my weaknesses even, it will be a cruel mortification to me’.<sup>98</sup> Though James conceded that William was perhaps right in admonishing him for his virulence, and

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<sup>93</sup> Tavor Bannet, *Empire of letters*, p. 43–44.

<sup>94</sup> T. E. Colebrooke, *Life of the Honourable Mountstuart Elphinstone* (London, 1884), p. 103; 122; 143.

<sup>95</sup> David A. Gerber, *Authors of their lives: The personal correspondence of British immigrants to North America in the nineteenth century* (New York, NY, 2006), p. 3.

<sup>96</sup> 29 Feb. 1805, Journal of Mountstuart Elphinstone, Elphinstone Collection, Mss Eur F88/359, OIOC, p. 93.

<sup>97</sup> Charles Metcalfe to J.W. Sherer, 16 Jun. 1807, in *The life and correspondence of Charles, Lord Metcalfe*, 2 vols., ed. J.W. Kaye (London, 1858), vol. I, p. 155.

<sup>98</sup> J.A. Kirkpatrick to William Kirkpatrick, 11 Nov. 1798, Private letters from his brother James Achilles Kirkpatrick, Papers of Maj-Gen William Kirkpatrick, Mss Eur F228/10, OIOC, p. 132.

even thanked his brother for his counsel, he nevertheless boldly claimed his right to ‘unburthen myself so unreservedly’.<sup>99</sup> While it was not unusual for ‘private’ letters to be shared among family and friends, in cases like these when the author deemed the contents unsuitable for wider consumption (usually because they touched on personally or politically sensitive subject matter), letters were labelled ‘private’, ‘secret’, or ‘most secret’, occasionally underlined several times for greater effect. Sometimes these stipulations were made in the text of the letter itself; after going on rather at length about the defects of a colleague in a letter to Lady Hood, Mountstuart Elphinstone concluded, ‘Your Ladyship will perhaps have surmised that this letter is not intended to be read at the breakfast table.’<sup>100</sup>

Letters like these might be cause for embarrassment if their contents became widely known, but they had little practical relevance for Company business. Where public and private correspondence converged more significantly, it was usually when Residents sought out auxiliary channels of information in cases where official, institutional sources had dried up. Sometimes it was a particular colleague in the political line who proved frustratingly reticent. No single individual appears to have inspired so much ill feeling on this head as the Resident Colonel Barry Close. In 1802 tensions ran high as the Governor-General-in-Council reprimanded James Achilles Kirkpatrick for what was perceived to be a tone of ‘dissatisfaction & of mistrust’ in his official letter addressed to Colonel Close. Though Kirkpatrick apologized profusely, vowing that he had written the letter entirely unmotivated by personal resentments, he nevertheless emphasized the risk to public interests arising out of ‘the ignorance under which I laboured – not only of the result of Colonel Close’s Negotiations but of his proceedings and intentions at large’.<sup>101</sup> Barry Close’s epistolary habits continued to draw complaints over the course of the following decade. This was a man who Henry Russell deemed ‘reserved and mysterious and everything he does, and everything he intends to do’, and who Mountstuart Elphinstone characterized as a ‘captious & fractious [...] old gentleman’ who ‘scarce ever answers letters’.<sup>102</sup> The acrimonious tone with which contemporaries described Close’s reserve suggests how important regular and accurate communication was in the political line. Individual idiosyncrasies could have broad ramifications given that Residents and other officials were reliant on the information contained in dispatches from colleagues at other courts. In consequence, the epistolary foibles

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<sup>99</sup> Ibid.

<sup>100</sup> Mountstuart Elphinstone to Lady Hood, 16 May 1813, Seaforth Papers, GD46/17/42, NRS, np.

<sup>101</sup> N. B. Edmonstone to James Achilles Kirkpatrick, 22 Nov. 1802, Papers of Maj-Gen William Kirkpatrick, Mss Eur F228/76, OIOC, p. 13.

<sup>102</sup> Henry Russell to James Casamaijor, 24 Mar. 1810, Russell Papers, MS. Eng. lett. d. 164, Bodl. Oxf., p. 141; Mountstuart Elphinstone to John Adam, 16 Jan. 1804, Papers of John Adam, Mss Eur F109/88, OIOC, np.

of fellow Residents were recurring points of discussion in official and familiar letters of the period.<sup>103</sup> Historians are left with reams of letters about letters which reflect the Residents' awareness of the finer points of what Eve Tavor Bannet describes as letteracy: 'the collection of different skills, values, and kinds of knowledge beyond mere literacy that were involved in achieving competency in the writing, reading, and interpreting of letters.'<sup>104</sup>

Though Residents sometimes squabbled amongst themselves, more often than not obstacles to the smooth flow of information emanated from the heart of the administration. One of the most regular complaints in the Residents' correspondence was of the neglect they suffered at the hands of the Governor-General-in-Council in Calcutta, who were supposed to be overseeing and supporting them in their role at Indian courts. Partly this neglect was a product of geographical distance between administrative centres, but the bigger problem seems to have been an overload of business which the central government struggled to keep under control. The Governor-General-in-Council in Calcutta was notorious for leaving its Residents in the lurch, sometimes failing to respond to important missives for months at a time. James Achilles Kirkpatrick had to wait impatiently not just for an acknowledgment of the treaty he had signed with the Nizam in 1799, but for any news or information at all from 'any one in the Calcutta Quarter'. Kirkpatrick's only consolation was that he was not alone in his state of neglect, noting 'the account Mr. Strachey gives of the extreme delay experienced in every public Department of late', further remarking that 'Scott the Lucknow Resident complains he says, that he has been half a year together without a Reply to references of the greatest importance!!'<sup>105</sup> In this instance, James Achilles was writing informally to his brother William, who was a member of Wellesley's council in Calcutta and could offer an insider's insight into the Governor-General's mood; this family connection was an important one for Kirkpatrick at a time when official contact was intermittent.

More than simply filling in the vacuum left by official sources, news passed through private correspondence tended to differ in content and tone. In personal letters individuals could express themselves more freely, and give rein to opinions and conjectures which they might have hesitated to make public in official dispatches. James Achilles Kirkpatrick, for one, lauded 'that freedom of narration and opinion which is the peculiar characteristic and

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<sup>103</sup> Henry Russell, for instance, contrasted Mountstuart Elphinstone's 'manly modest Dispatches' with 'the vaunting mawkish stuff of [Richard] Jenkins.' Henry Russell to his father, 6 Mar. 1818, Russell Papers, MS. Eng. lett. c. 151, Bodl. Oxf., p. 216.

<sup>104</sup> Tavor Bannet, *Empire of letters*, p. xvii.

<sup>105</sup> J.A. Kirkpatrick to William Kirkpatrick, 25 Aug. 1801, Private letters from his brother James Achilles Kirkpatrick, Papers of Maj-Gen William Kirkpatrick, Mss Eur F228/13, OIOC, p. 135.

perhaps the merit of private correspondence.’<sup>106</sup> Charles Warre Malet, Resident at Poona, likewise seemed to derive great succor from the letters of George Cherry, the official at Benares, whose correspondence, he claimed, contained ‘Landmarks which to a Wanderer like me in the Wide Sea of Politics must Ever be Extremely grateful & useful.’<sup>107</sup> Malet repaid the favour by sending Cherry ‘my Country Intelligence which I must continue to recommend to your attentive Perusal as Containing a number of Items & Clues for Consideration which tho highly worthy of Notice are not of a nature to be introduced into my official Correspondence with Government.’<sup>108</sup> In the interests of maintaining their personal credit, Residents were generally careful to limit their official reports to concrete facts, but bare accounts of developments at court were sometimes of little use without an interpretative layer to give them context and meaning. Private letters could therefore be a useful supplement to official despatches.

This intersection of private and public correspondence could prove problematic, however. Sometimes networks of information fragmented; crucial facts were channeled through private letters rather than public correspondence, thereby becoming inaccessible to the central government who would otherwise have received copies of the letters being exchanged. Thomas Sydenham lost his position at the Hyderabad Residency because he failed to apprise the government of his correspondence with a captain implicated in an army revolt; although Captain Doveton had consulted Sydenham as a friend, the Governor-General-in-Council argued that it was Sydenham’s duty to report the exchange, and charged him with having acted ‘with a deliberate purpose to conceal from the knowledge of Government all the circumstances of that transaction’.<sup>109</sup> At the same time, the disclosure of personal correspondence in this fashion was not universally regarded as appropriate, even under such dramatic circumstances. When Henry Russell learned of what had passed at Doveton’s trial, where Sydenham’s private letter was made public, he wrote to his brother Charles that ‘if he [Sydenham] authorized Doveton to produce it upon the Court Martial, he is a Fool; and if Doveton produced it without that authority, he is a Villain. They may make the Selection between them.’<sup>110</sup> Where personal and professional relationships overlapped, as they so often

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<sup>106</sup> J.A. Kirkpatrick to William Kirkpatrick, 15 Oct. 1799, Private letters from his brother James Achilles Kirkpatrick, Papers of Maj-Gen William Kirkpatrick, Mss Eur F228/11, OIOC, p. 275.

<sup>107</sup> C.W. Malet to G.F. Cherry, 29 Jun. 1793, Letter book, Diaries and papers of Sir Charles Malet, Mss Eur F149/56, OIOC, p. 220.

<sup>108</sup> C.W. Malet to G.F. Cherry, 5 Jul. 1793, *Ibid.*, p. 228.

<sup>109</sup> Government at Fort St. George to Board of Control, 24 Mar. 1810, BC, IOR/F/4/335/7665, OIOC, p. 30-31.

<sup>110</sup> Henry Russell to Charles Russell, 1 Apr. 1810, Russell Papers, MS Eng. lett. d. 151, Bodl. Oxf., p. 38.

did in India given that most Britons living there were in one way or another associated with the Company, the lines between public and private were clouded and complications ensued.

Given the difficulties which could potentially erupt around the imbrication of public interests and private relationships, some Company employees appear to have considered the maintenance of a strict distinction between the two as the best defense against future animadversions. This strategy is rendered most transparent in the correspondence between brothers, where older siblings advised younger ones about the desirability of disentangling political and personal topics.<sup>111</sup> The Resident Henry Russell was particularly keen to educate his younger brother Charles in the art of letter-writing, and his missives are therefore very revealing of the epistolary conventions of the day. Henry commented on Charles' style ('where[,] did you imbibe that horrid Expression "Your Letter may hereafter perhaps *come to Hand*"? It smells so strongly of the Haberdasher') and his punctuality, or lack thereof. ('Reciprocity is the Law of Epistolary Communications'.)<sup>112</sup> What Henry emphasized most pointedly was the importance of differentiating between the appropriate contents of private and public correspondence, respectively. In a letter written on 12 June 1805, for example, Henry chided Charles for openly expressing his opinions on the present administration of the Company. 'The Difference of our Opinions respecting Lord Cornwallis as a Governor', Henry reminded him, 'is a Difference of a political nature; which it is always impolite, and frequently dangerous, to render the subject of a familiar Letter.'<sup>113</sup> In a later communication, dated 4 June 1810, Russell censured the inclusion of personal details in a letter which Charles had composed to the secretary to the Governor General, in which Charles alluded to then-Resident Thomas Sydenham's plans to meet Colonel Barry Close and his brother, George Sydenham. In Henry's view, Sydenham's arrangement was 'a private Thing, [with] nothing in it either to require or deserve that it should be reported to the G.G. [Governor-General]'.<sup>114</sup> In Henry Russell's mind, the safest route to take in official letters was to be as objective and impersonal as possible; by avoiding points of dispute or questions of interpretation, it was possible to limit the likelihood of disagreement or reproach.<sup>115</sup>

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<sup>111</sup> William Kirkpatrick also regularly chided his brother James Achilles Kirkpatrick for mixing private and public business in his correspondence. See J.A. Kirkpatrick to William Kirkpatrick, 15 Oct. 1799, and 15 Aug. 1799, both in Mss Eur F228/11, Papers of Maj.-Gen. William Kirkpatrick, Mss Eur F228/11, OIOC, p. 275 and p. 207.

<sup>112</sup> Henry Russell to Charles Russell, 12 Aug. 1802, Russell Papers, MS Eng. lett. c. 155, Bodl. Oxf., p. 19; Henry Russell to Charles Russell, 9 Jun. 1802, Ibid., p. 15.

<sup>113</sup> Henry Russell to Charles Russell, 12 Jun. 1805, Ibid.

<sup>114</sup> Henry Russell to Charles Russell, 4 Jun. 1810, Russell Papers, MSS Eng. lett. d. 151, Bodl. Oxf., p. 99.

<sup>115</sup> Henry Russell to Charles Russell, 13 Aug. 1810, Russell Papers, MSS Eng. lett. d. 151, Bodl. Oxf., p. 206.

At the same time, there were advantages to blurring the boundaries between public and private epistolary modes in letters to Calcutta. The uncertain divide between the two could give Residents room for manoeuvre when considering how to report events at court. This is what is suggested to us by Henry Russell's commentary on his means of conducting his dispute with Colonel Montresor, the head of the Hyderabad subsidiary detachment. Accompanying a letter to his brother on the subject, Henry forwarded a copy of an official despatch along with a private letter he'd written to the secretary to the Governor-General Neil Benjamin Edmonstone. Henry asked his brother's candid opinion on these documents. He himself was sanguine, particularly about his private letter to Edmonstone: 'I would have made it a public One, but that I should not perhaps be authorized in putting Extracts from Montresor's private Letters to me into a public Despatch, without his Permission, and that my reference to the conduct of the Bombay Govt is too nice a Point for me to touch upon securely in any other than a private Letter.'<sup>116</sup> Knowing that the conventions governing public dispatches dictated against the inclusion of passages from personal letters, and wary of touching on the politically sensitive issue of the relationship between the governments of Bombay and Calcutta, Russell nevertheless forwarded these points in a private letter which, trusting in the uncertainty underlying the divide between public and private, he thought might very well influence the outcome of a public dispute. Likewise, when in 1810 Russell feared that he had overstepped his orders by giving the ruler of Poona the aid of the subsidiary force without the previous sanction of the Governor-General-in-Council, Russell gives his explanation in two forms, one official, the other private, describing himself as being anxious to 'avail myself of the freedom of a private letter to discuss them [points of debate] more at length than I could under an official form'.<sup>117</sup>

Barry Close, though in other respects a bad correspondent (if his contemporaries in the service are to be believed), likewise furnishes us with an example of the ways in which a Resident might use the private epistolary form to sidestep an indiscretion. From the very first sentence of his letter of 29 April 1802, Close signals the unconventionality of his epistolary choice, writing that 'the sequel of this address will explain to your Lordship the motives which induce me to give it a private form.'<sup>118</sup> The letter describes a secret meeting between the Peshwa of Poona and Close, which the Peshwa himself had proposed on the condition that Close agree to keep all topics of discussion, and even the meeting itself, a secret. Although Close clearly perceived the value of a private conversation with the Peshwa unattended by his ministers or constrained by the formalities of the open *darbar*, it was nevertheless obvious

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<sup>116</sup> Henry Russell to Charles Russell, 2 Sept. 1810, Russell Papers, MS Eng. lett. d. 151, Bodl. Oxf., p. 237.

<sup>117</sup> Henry Russell to N.B. Edmonstone, 16 Dec. 1810, in *Poona records*, vol. VII, p. 535.

<sup>118</sup> Barry Close to Marquess Wellesley, 29 Apr. 1802, in *Poona records*, vol. X, p. 7.

that Close would be in serious breach of his orders if he met with the ruler without reporting it to the Governor-General-in-Council. Accordingly, Close suggested a compromise: 'I should adopt a private mode of address that would induce your Lordship to allow the subject to continue secret till disclosing it should become a matter of indifference, and that his Highness might rely that beyond your Lordship I should observe the most profound secrecy.'<sup>119</sup> To this the Peshwa acquiesced. By resorting to a private letter, Close could make a show of confidentiality and good faith to the Peshwa, without betraying his responsibility to the Governor-General. Private letters could thus provide a kind of useful middle ground for the Resident, although in this case Close had nothing much to report after the meeting other than that the Peshwa was trying to set their relationship on a more friendly and intimate footing.<sup>120</sup>

Thus, the variety of epistolary modes available to the Residents, from public to demi-official to private, each had their own advantages. While there were certain dangers associated with breaching public topics in unofficial correspondence, there were also rewards; news communicated in this fashion was enriched by an interpretative layer of opinion often missing from official accounts, while the looser conventions of familiar letters could sometimes allow Residents to advance arguments which would have been considered inappropriate in public dispatches. The existence of this disparate tradition was therefore a useful weapon in the Resident's repertoire, meaning that Residents continued to employ it even in the face of official reproof. This ability to move between public and private was part and parcel of the Residents' larger powers of representation, a point of great concern for the administrators in London and Calcutta who often had no choice but to put their faith in the Resident's version of events transpiring at court. The Residents' strategic modes of reportage raise the question of what they might have been trying to gloss over, and why; the following section will consider in greater detail some of the tensions which flared up around the credibility of the Residents' testimony.

#### **4. Silences and misrepresentations in the official archive**

Bernard Cohn once famously described the vast records of the East India Company as the embodiment of his argument about the conquest of India as a conquest of knowledge. Cohn identified the dusty tomes in the former India Office Library as a form of tribute, exacted from communities of learned Indians, which enabled Company rule.<sup>121</sup> Recent studies of colonial archives, however, have suggested that the sheer volume of records should be

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<sup>119</sup> Ibid., p. 8.

<sup>120</sup> Ibid.

<sup>121</sup> Cohn, *Colonialism and its forms of knowledge*, p. 1.

interpreted less as a sign of imperial confidence than as a symptom of ‘epistemic anxiety’.<sup>122</sup> Remarking on the difficulty with which colonial officials in distant administrative headquarters struggled to keep abreast of emerging events, historians like H.V. Bowen and Ann Laura Stoler have described the archive as a repository of knowledge riven with silences and omissions, always in the process of ‘catching up’ to realities on the ground.<sup>123</sup>

Meanwhile, the assumed connections between documentation, transparency, and accountability have also been brought into question. Bhavani Raman has observed that documentary practices which were supposed to make visible the exercise of colonial power, rendering it amenable to the oversight of the central administration, in fact enabled precisely the kinds of corruption they were meant to prevent: ‘far from fixing, codifying, and stabilising or reconciling the contradictions of rule, acts of filing, listing, and registering generate domains for all manner of transactions at the margins of the documentary state.’<sup>124</sup> Given the political significance of their work, the Residents were under more pressure than other Company employees to keep the administration of Calcutta apprised of their activities, even keeping daily journals which they were expected to send along to the Governor-General at set intervals. Still, these reams of paper did not entirely efface doubts about the reliability of the Residents’ representations. Trust was central to the operations of the Company’s intelligence-gathering apparatus, given that the secretariat in Calcutta had no other option but to trust in the accuracy of the reports they received from distant Residencies. Yet trust continued to be a problem and a point of ill feeling between the Residents in Indian capitals and their superiors in Company headquarters.

To the extent that Company archives were patchy and partial, the Residents were certainly contributing to their unevenness. Residents consciously foreclosed lines of communication emanating from the Indian court as a means of consolidating their own role as mediator, and the power and authority attendant on that position. As Nathalie Rothman has pointed out, though we often take the ‘in-betweenness’ of cultural brokers for granted, intermediaries have a vested interest in constructing cultural boundaries and strategically fashioning themselves as in-between so as to secure their positions by rendering themselves invaluable.<sup>125</sup> The Resident thus had practical reasons for presenting himself as uniquely equipped to manage the concerns of the Company at court, defending his prerogative on the basis of the threat presented to the British public image in India by unregulated intercourse

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<sup>122</sup> Stoler, *Along the archival grain: Epistemic anxieties and colonial common sense* (Princeton, NJ, 2009).

<sup>123</sup> Stoler, *Along the archival grain*, p. 4; Bowen, *The business of empire*, p. 180.

<sup>124</sup> Bhavani Raman, *Document Raj: Writings and scribes in early colonial South India* (Chicago, IL, 2012), p. 3.

<sup>125</sup> E. Nathalie Rothman, *Brokering empire: Trans-imperial subjects between Venice and Istanbul* (Ithaca, NY, 2012), p. 14; 184.



between the Indian ruler and Europeans outside the political line. Such unofficial relationships, it was argued, might upset the Resident's finely calibrated diplomatic strategies, potentially undermining his authority at court. Colin Macaulay, the Resident at Travancore, successfully applied to the Madras government to order the Commercial Resident at Anjengo William Augustus Handley to refrain from corresponding with the Rajah or *diwan* of Travancore, convincing the Madras government of 'the serious injury which might arise from the appearance of a divided authority in the administration of the British Interests in that part of India'.<sup>126</sup> Even the most seemingly trivial transactions could be refused at the Resident's say-so; Richard Strachey stubbornly disallowed the exchange of letters and gifts between the Nawab Vizier of Awadh and a certain Dr. Pears, a former acquaintance of the Nawab stationed at Chittra, even when the correspondence consisted of minor pleasantries and the exchange of gifts.<sup>127</sup>

It wasn't just marginal figures like Dr. Pears that were prevented from developing unmediated relationships with Indian courts. Residents were empowered to deny the very highest echelons of the Company's staff the privilege of communicating with Indian sovereigns. Even the Governor General was prohibited from engaging in such a private correspondence.<sup>128</sup> When Lady Hood (a visitor to Lucknow) innocently forwarded a letter to the Governor-General directly from the Nawab, the Marquess of Hastings, in his own words, 'remonstrated with Lady Hood by Letter for having forwarded even such a paper in breach of the Regulation which requires all communications from Foreign Princes to go thro' the Resident at the respective Courts.' Hastings then informed the Resident John Baillie of the circumstance, 'that he might be confident no indirect correspondence would ever be allowed by me'.<sup>129</sup>

The limited relationship between the Indian court and the Governor-General-in-Council meant that the Resident had it in his power to frame his reports to his advantage, and, in so doing, to misrepresent developments at court which were adverse to his self-interest. The Resident therefore had an advantage when it came to courting the favour and support of the Governor-General-in-Council over and against the appeals of the Indian courtly elite. The exceptions tend to prove the rule. For example, the Marquess of Hastings did eventually dismiss John Baillie from his post as Resident, in accordance with the Nawab Vizier Ghazi-

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<sup>126</sup> Government at Fort St George to N.B. Edmonstone, 9 Sept. 1807, BC, IOR/F/4/244/5536, OIOC, p. 62.

<sup>127</sup> Enclosure, Richard Strachey to John Adam, 26 Jun. 1817, John Adam Papers, Mss Eur D585, OIOC, p. 196.

<sup>128</sup> Removal of Lieut. Col. John Baillie from the office of Resident at Lucknow, Aug. 1814-Mar. 1816, BC, IOR/F/4/510/12267, OIOC, p. 47.

<sup>129</sup> Ibid.

ud-din Haidar's demands, but only after several years and a series of written and oral complaints from both the Nawab and his predecessor Saadat Ali. Hastings, in retrospect, discovered that Baillie's association with the Company had made the Nawab and his ministers loath to cross him, meaning that Baillie 'had no terms to keep with His Excellency beyond the screening himself from having direct indecorum proved against him'.<sup>130</sup> The Nawab's resentments were therefore suppressed and, concealed beneath a thin veneer of civility, allowed to fester.<sup>131</sup> Relations with the Resident soured to such an extent that the Nawab declared himself willing to take desperate measures and to ally himself with any power able to take the field against the Company.<sup>132</sup> Although Baillie was caught in the end, the fact that relations with the Nawab were allowed to degenerate to such a point illustrates the extent to which the Company was unable or on occasion unwilling to monitor the Residents closely.

The epistolary exchanges between the Governor General Minto and the Nawab Vizier Saadat Ali Khan during the earlier part of the crisis make this lack of oversight amply evident. When in 1808 the Vizier requested a private interview with the then-Governor General, Minto not only refused to make a personal visit, but reprimanded the Nawab for withholding his entire confidence from the Resident, reminding the Nawab that nothing could be achieved outside the official and designated channels. Tellingly, in response to this crisis Baillie placed his own behaviour beyond suspicion, asserting in his letters that he would have been uneasy about these protests on the part of the Nawab 'if a minute & attentive introspect of my own proceedings at the Durbar, & of every recent discussion between his Excellency and me had not entirely precluded the possibility of my connecting the avowed distress of his mind with any part of my proceedings'.<sup>133</sup> In 1813, when the Vizier wrote to Governor General Minto again, explicitly complaining this time about the insulting and aggressive tone of the Resident and accusing the Resident moreover of falsifying the Nawab's words in letters to the Governor-General, Minto was once more dismissive. Responding to the Nawab's description of a particular instance of threatening conduct adopted by the Resident John Baillie, Minto referred to 'the clear and satisfactory statement' which Baillie gave in writing of that meeting, as well as the 'acknowledged integrity and veracity of that officer', on the basis of which Minto remained convinced that 'your Excellency must have entirely misapprehended the tenor, spirit and manner of his discourses to your Excellency on that occasion'.<sup>134</sup> Ironically,

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<sup>130</sup> Ibid., p. 113.

<sup>131</sup> Ibid., p. 113-114.

<sup>132</sup> Ibid., p. 116.

<sup>133</sup> John Baillie to N.B. Edmonstone, 14 Mar. 1808, BC, IOR/F/4/251/5632, OIOC, p. 5

<sup>134</sup> Earl of Minto to Nawab Vizier of Awadh, 5 Mar. 1813, Out-letters 1813, Persian Correspondence, Minto Papers, MS 11594, NLS, p. 23

Minto concluded his letter to the Vizier by reprimanding him for the tone which *he*, the Vizier, adopted in his letters to the Resident.

Similarly, following the outbreak of the revolt in Travancore, the parliamentary Board of Control in London were shocked to find that they had not been apprised of letters of complaint written by the Rajah and minister of Travancore to the Governor-General, and criticized the Indian government's apparent disregard for the appeals contained therein.<sup>135</sup> The Rajah of Travancore himself provided an account, in a letter to government, of the isolation and silence imposed on him by the Resident during this period. Because of Company conventions, the Rajah was forced to entrust his letters of complaint about Lieutenant Colonel Colin Macaulay, into the hands of Lieutenant Colonel Macaulay himself, who delivered these letters in person to the Governor-General in Bengal. When Macaulay returned with letters from Governor-General Wellesley, the Rajah was, in his own words, 'utterly astonished', remarking that 'the Colonel had impressed His Excellency's [the Governor-General's] mind with a belief of what I had never represented'.<sup>136</sup> The Rajah then attempted to communicate with Wellesley directly by letter, only to be reprimanded for not transmitting his epistle through the channel of the Resident. Later, when (according to the Rajah's account) the Resident attempted to impose a new treaty upon him by force, the Rajah felt that he had no option but to concede defeat, 'apprehending that if I wrote a letter to the supreme Government for the purpose of exposing my innocence I could only transmit it through the channel of Lieutenant Colonel Macaulay.'<sup>137</sup>

At the same time, the case of Colin Macaulay also exemplifies how such dissimulation on the part of the Resident could lead the government to doubt the truth of his reports, even where his information was accurate. Despite their earlier disregard for the complaints issuing from Travancore, the government appear to have entertained a growing suspicion that Colin Macaulay was not to be trusted in his representation of that court. This budding doubt seems to have prevented them from furnishing him with military support when the uprising at Travancore finally did erupt. According to the Parliamentary Board of Control's enquiry, the government countermanded the orders for marching troops to the frontiers of Travancore following the outbreak of violence, and recalled Colonel Macaulay from the Residency. In justifying their actions, the Indian government stated merely that they had 'received information of a private nature from different quarters which certainly impressed [them] with a belief that the rumours respecting the preparations in Travancore had

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<sup>135</sup> Board of Control to Government at Fort St. George, 29 Sept. 1809, General Correspondence with India, IOR/E/4/904, OIOC, p. 284-288.

<sup>136</sup> Rajah of Travancore to Earl of Minto, 16 Aug. 1807, In-letters 1807, Persian Correspondence, Minto Papers, MS 11571, NLS, p. 62.

<sup>137</sup> Ibid., p. 63.

been exaggerated.’ They founded their apprehensions on the ‘well known’ fact that the Resident was on bad terms with the minister. Meanwhile, the minister had continued to send letters to government evincing ‘the strongest professions of his earnest desire and endeavour to preserve undisturbed the subsisting relations between the two Countries’ (starkly contradicting the Resident’s desperate letters reporting the minister’s preparations for war).<sup>138</sup> In this instance, distrust of the Resident had built to such a pitch that private information from unnamed sources, corroborated by protestations from the rebellious minister, meant that Colonel Macaulay was left undefended and in the end forced to run for his life when on the night of 27 December an armed force led by the minister attacked and plundered Macaulay’s home. By misrepresenting goings-on in Travancore, Macaulay endangered his credit with the Company, which in turn meant that he could not rely on their support when his very life was in danger.

The example of Colin Macaulay complicates our assumptions about the relationship between administrators in Company headquarters and agents on the ground. It reminds us that while Company officials might benefit from strategies of concealment, there were also advantages to official transparency; honesty was one significant means of generating trust, ensuring that the Resident could call on Company support when necessary. Moreover, being open with one’s superiors about an intended line of action was an important way of limiting personal liability if diplomatic relations took a turn for the worse; it meant that the Resident could later justify his actions by pointing out that the logic of his decision had been corroborated by senior officials. This was a general rule of diplomatic conduct in the early modern period; as de Wicquefort advised his readers, ‘the Minister who undertakes an Affair for which he has no Orders, is responsible for the Success thereof; whereas he who only executes the Orders that are given him, how unjust or unreasonable soever they may be, charges his Master therewith.’<sup>139</sup> Thus, while there are notorious instances of Residents painting an inaccurate picture of developments at court, Residents also stood to gain from presenting detailed portraits of events to their superiors in Calcutta, in the interests of risk management.

Yet, the example of Henry Russell suggests that Residents who operated according to this principle might find that their forthrightness was not repaid in kind by their superiors in Calcutta. Russell (then Acting Resident at Poona) was outraged when the Governor-General-in-Council urged him not to intervene too directly in the dispute between the Peshwa and the

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<sup>138</sup> Board of Control to Government at Fort St. George, 29 Sept. 1809, General Correspondence with India, IOR/E/4/904, OIOC, p. 284-288.

<sup>139</sup> Wicquefort, *The ambassador and his functions*, p. 326.

southern *jagirdars*, an order which in his mind directly contradicted the instructions he'd initially been given when the conflict first broke out.<sup>140</sup> Russell decided to adhere to the Company's original policy, taking an aggressive stance which in the end successfully convinced the recalcitrant *jagirdar* Appah Sahib to submit to the Peshwa's authority. While Russell conceded that the Governor-General-in-Council could hardly complain about the outcome of the negotiations, he felt that 'it will be rather inconsistent for them to praise the End, after blaming the means'. Russell's conclusions following this incident are worth quoting in full for what they reveal about the awkward position which the Resident was sometimes placed in because of fluctuations higher up in the political line:

They have used me very unhandsomely; so much so that I never can feel an confidence in them again. Before I set my Foot on the Ground, I will always hereafter make them chalk out the very spot on which I am to place it. They send me a set of Instructions so plain and clear, that I will defy a Child of six years old to mistake their fair meaning; and no sooner have I begun to act upon them, and gone too far to retract with credit, then they send me another set, attempting, with the most frivolous refinement, to explain the Tone of the former ones entirely away, and insinuating pretty plainly, 'if you act upon our Instructions, and are successful, well and good; but if, in consequence of your acting upon them, any Expense or temporary Inconvenience is incurred, the Blame will rest with you.' This is not the way a government ought to act in.<sup>141</sup>

The Governor-General might be dependent on the representations of the Resident when it came to developments at Indian courts, but the Resident, in turn, relied on the Governor-General for guidance, legitimacy, and support. While the Governor-General-in-Council might suspect the Residents of omitting or misrepresenting information, Residents for their part were prone to complain about the lack of direction and assistance they received from Calcutta, which, as mentioned in Section 3, often forced Residents to seek information from auxiliary channels. Residents, then, might argue that the Governor-General-in-Council were more often the source of miscommunication and artifice in the political line, to the detriment of the Company's political interests at Indian courts.

Trust has long been recognized as foundational to social order; by consciously or unconsciously enabling us to form expectations of other people, trust provides a basis for human association. As we will see in Chapter 2, trust figured centrally in eighteenth-century conceptions of international law, as well as playing an important part in the scientific enterprise and other knowledge-building projects.<sup>142</sup> Yet trust was a valuable commodity which seems to have been in relatively short supply in the political line. Company administrators were inclined to place greater trust in the British Resident than in the Indian

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<sup>140</sup> Henry Russell to James Casamaijor, 17 Dec. 1810, Russell Papers, MS. Eng. lett. d. 162, Bodl. Oxf., p. 121.

<sup>141</sup> Henry Russell to James Casamaijor, 9 Feb. 1811, *Ibid.*, p. 146.

<sup>142</sup> Steven Shapin, *A social history of truth: Civility and science in seventeenth-century England* (Chicago, IL, 1994), for the trust-dependence of the social order see p. 11; for the role of trust in early modern science see p. 42.

courtly elite, but that trust was not boundless. The Resident's distance from imperial centres of control, and the discretionary power which he enjoyed in consequence, were known and questioned by those higher up in the political line. Residents who were suspicious of the Indian courtly elite tended to use their letters as an instrument for cultivating the same suspicion among their superiors in the Company, but the more they deviated from the facts, the greater the risk that they would bear the brunt of their misrepresentations in the end. Yet even those who rigorously adhered to the Company's standard of scrupulous documentation had reason to feel that they were poorly rewarded for their candour by the lack of clear communications from Calcutta. Thus, lack of trust was a common trait underlying Company intercourse as well as being a feature of interactions between Residents and Indian informants.

## **Conclusion**

Political intelligence is known to have played an important role in the Company's political expansion in the subcontinent in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth century. Through the Residents, however, we are alerted to some of the social and cultural dimensions which previous studies of the Company's communications and intelligence-gathering networks have elided. We see how letters, as a medium of communication as well as a material object, could serve powerful political and diplomatic functions, which Residents and their Indian counterparts expertly sought to control. The strategies through which letters were composed and deployed, whether in public ceremonies or in private chambers, were just as important as the routes by which they were transmitted.

While Residents had access to technical knowledge and experience which allowed them to use letters in this way, different strategies had to be devised to address the unruly realm of oral culture and public opinion. In response to the rumours industriously circulated by rival factions, Residents publicized the Company's victories, and minimized its problems. To effectively combat the stories percolating through the streets and bazaars of royal capitals, however, the Resident relied on the smooth functioning of the Company's information networks, and in this he was often disappointed. Through the eyes of the Resident, we see how suspicion, doubt, and mismanagement were rife within the Company itself, where essential information was liable to fall through the cracks. Tensions erupted as a result of distance, an overload of paperwork, neglect, fragmentation, and explicit strategies of misrepresentation. C.A. Bayly argued that there was an information crisis within the Company in the nineteenth century arising from its inability to successfully exploit Indian networks, but overlaying these networks were European relationships that were equally hard to police.

This aspect of the Resident's work brings to light more general themes relating to his place in Indian courtly society as well as his position within the Company's official hierarchy. Contemptuous attitudes to Indian news media reflect the cultural arrogance we might expect of British imperial officials, but the skill with which the Resident managed the exchange and interception of letters suggests how certain basic similarities between Indian and British political culture facilitated the consolidation of the Resident's influence at court. The British and Indian elite had in common a highly sophisticated epistolary culture which placed great importance in subtleties of prose and address as well as the materiality of seals, ink, and paper. With the aid of skilled scribes and translators, Residents were therefore well equipped to penetrate, and make sense of, the stream of letters which flowed from court to court. At the same time, the Resident's trustworthiness as a reliable conduit of information was, from a Company perspective, ever in doubt. Not only did administrators in London and Calcutta fear that the Resident was being taken in by Indian informants with agendas of their own, they also worried that the Resident was using private letters to forward information which ought, by rights, to have been accessible to their scrutiny and supervision.

This chapter has focused more on the use of the pen than the sword, but based on the letters and rumours discussed here, it should already be apparent that violence or the threat of violence was a recurring feature of Residency business. Most of the political intelligence which Residents noted in their journals and forwarded in their letters related to the threat of war or general revolt, while much of the gossip circulating in the streets involved alleged incidents of British brutality. The following chapter will consider the role of violence in the developing Residency system, both as an ideological justification for Company intervention as well as a mode of imperial authority.

## Chapter 2. Politics by other means: The use of force in theory and practice

One distinctive feature of the East India Company in the early nineteenth century was its militarism: its employees' high valuation of, and persistent reliance on, military measures. Writing to *The Times*, a Company officer affirmed that 'the influence we have acquired in India is by arms and can be preserved by victory alone. Public opinion follows our successful standards, but would speedily quit them in the first moment of defeat.'<sup>1</sup> The Company's power and authority on the subcontinent was, effectively, equated with its ability to bring physical force to bear on recalcitrant populations. Contemporary opinion was that this emphasis on military might was in sync with pre-colonial conceptions of political legitimacy, which was believed to rest, at least in part, on displays of strength.<sup>2</sup> While there were undoubtedly dissenters, historian Douglas Peers has shown how Anglo-Indian militarism united conservatives, orientalist, and liberal imperialists who, though they might have different visions of the kind of empire they aspired to in India, nevertheless agreed that the threat of punitive measures was the only means of securing them.<sup>3</sup> This logic underpinned the use of force on different scales, from military campaigns to corporeal punishment; all were described and justified in similar terms, that is, with reference to the perceived nature of Indians and Indian political culture.

Some of the most vocal proponents of this view were Residents, and the aim of this chapter is to explain why the men of the political line felt the need for these coercive tactics, and with what consequences. Although historians have conventionally accepted Douglas Peers's portrayal of the East India Company as a garrison state, more work remains to be done with regards to how violence was understood and used as a technique of power by the Company's political agents during the formative period of Company rule.<sup>4</sup> The absence of violence is particularly noteworthy in existing accounts of the Residencies, which tend either to present a rosy portrait of cross-cultural harmony, or an image of undisturbed imperial hegemony. These seemingly diametrically opposed portrayals both obscure the stories of

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<sup>1</sup> Anonymous, 'To the editor of The Times', 7 Jan. 1817, *Times* (London).

<sup>2</sup> For description of *danda*, 'the power of the staff', in Hindu theory of kingship, see Kate Brittlebank, *Tipu Sultan's search for legitimacy: Islam and kingship in a Hindu domain* (Delhi, 1997), p. 85-86.

<sup>3</sup> Douglas Peers, *Between Mars and Mammon: Colonial armies and the garrison state in India 1819-1835* (London, 1995), p. 7.

<sup>4</sup> Recent scholarship has highlighted violence as a quotidian aspect of imperial rule, but it focuses predominantly on British India in the late nineteenth century. Prominent examples are Elizabeth Kolsky, *Colonial justice in British India* (Cambridge, 2010), p. 11; Jordanna Bailkin, 'The boot and the spleen: When was murder possible in British India?', *CSSH*, 48:2 (2006): 462-93; Taylor C. Sherman, *State violence and punishment in India* (Abingdon, 2010), p. 1.



resistance and repression which saturate the sources, passing over the Residents' vulnerability as well as how aggressively Residents sought to pre-empt perceived threats. While Michael Fisher and Barbara Ramusack are right to suggest that the Company's superior military resources were an important component of indirect rule, they overemphasize the compliance of the Indian population when confronted with the Company's military might.<sup>5</sup> This chapter seeks to recover the turbulence and political unrest which was such a prominent feature of Residency life in the early nineteenth century.

Just as critically, this chapter highlights the serious differences of opinion which existed in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth century regarding the meanings of violence and its appropriate forms and uses. These varied understandings of violence informed its uneven deployment and the ways in which such acts were subsequently debated as acceptable or otherwise. Company policy on the use of force was particularly far from uniform where the Residents were concerned. After all, the Residents were supposed to be diplomats and mediators, responsible for conciliating the ruler and his ministers to Company policy. The wider context of war and resistance seems to have predisposed the Residents to the use of brute tactics in pursuit of their political agendas, but this was, in the minds of their superiors, a troubling affinity which contradicted the very purpose for which the Residency, as an institution, had been created. The use of physical force therefore became a significant point of tension between the Residents on the ground and their superiors in London and Calcutta. Residents could not envision a form of political influence in India which did not manifest itself through violence, while their superiors were, on the contrary, determined to preserve a sharp, if somewhat artificial, distinction between their military and political arms. An analysis of the Residents therefore highlights the ways in which war and diplomacy, violence and politics, intermingled in an imperial context, flying in the face of a contemporary discourse which sought to justify imperial influence by emphasizing its civilizing and peace-bringing effects.

The following chapter will consider the causes and consequences of these attitudes about the use of force within the political line, as well as how the Governor-General-in-Council and the Court of Directors in London endeavoured to contain them. Section 1 will recreate the contemporary atmosphere of tumult and uncertainty in India and discuss its impact on the Residents. Section 2 will describe the different cultural and intellectual frameworks through which the Residents understood and ascribed meaning to the disorder they witnessed in the subcontinent. The remainder of the chapter will examine how the Residents' convictions about the necessity of coercive measures translated into practice;

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<sup>5</sup> Fisher, *Indirect rule in India*, p. 230; Ramusack, *The Indian princes and their states*, p. 51.

Section 3 will focus on the Residents' engagement with the Company's military arm, and Section 4 will consider the use of punitive measures like floggings and executions. While the Residents and their superiors might have shared similar ideas about the place of violence in Indian political culture, this chapter shows that they differed dramatically when it came to the question of how far the Residents themselves should employ these tactics.

### 1. Spirals of violence

Violence begets violence. The wider context of war can set the conditions for individual acts of repression; in an environment where perceived 'enemies' are dehumanized, where violence is commonplace if not entirely normalized, individuals are more prepared to resort to violent measures. The rhetoric which justifies state-sanctioned military action can also allow for and legitimize the use of force in other contexts. In consequence, times of war are often characterized by heightened incidences of abuse and interpersonal violence, so that, as anthropologist Nancy Scheper-Hughes put it, 'we can rightly speak of chains, spirals, and mirrors of violence.'<sup>6</sup> Social psychologist Ignacio Martin-Baro eloquently attested to this psychosocial impact of war based on his fieldwork in El Salvador, arguing that 'there is little doubt that the almost compulsive violence, which can dominate interpersonal relations [...] are intrinsically related to the growing preponderance of military forms of thinking, feeling, and acting in social life.' Martin-Baro influentially termed this process 'the militarization of the mind'.<sup>7</sup>

Residents might have spent more time at their desks than on the battlefield, but their world was not bounded by the physical limits of the Residency building. The early decades of the nineteenth century were turbulent years, and that turbulence seeped into the Residents' routine business and coloured their perceptions of Indian courts. Crucially, the years 1798 to 1818 were years of war: against Mysore, the Marathas, the Nepalese Gurkhas, and the Pindaris. While the Company was almost unquestionably the predominant military power in the subcontinent during this period, 'the transference of power in South Asia was not analogous to passing the baton of governance in a relay race', as military historian Randolph Cooper phrased it.<sup>8</sup> Indian regional powers had access to military technologies not dissimilar from those employed by the Company, and deployed the expertise of European mercenaries

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<sup>6</sup> Nancy Scheper Hughes and Philippe Bourgois (eds.), *Violence in war and peace* (Malden, MA, 2004), p. 1.

<sup>7</sup> Ignacio Martin-Baro, 'Political violence and war as causes of psychosocial trauma in El Salvador', *International Journal of Mental Health*, 18:1 (1989): 18.

<sup>8</sup> Randolph G.S. Cooper, *The Anglo-Maratha campaigns and the contest for India: The struggle for control of the South Asian military economy* (Cambridge, 2003), p. 1.

to their advantage.<sup>9</sup> Others capitalized on their intimate knowledge of the landscape, eluding the grasp of European detachments who longed for the familiar conventions of pitched battles.<sup>10</sup> Although a secure line of credit gave the Company the advantage when it came to control of the military market, the Company's expanding presence in the subcontinent did not at all go unchallenged, leading some prominent members of the political line to fear that 'From the Pinnacle to the Abyss might be only one step'.<sup>11</sup>

The Gurkhas were particularly successful at using the rugged environment of the Nepalese borderlands to their advantage, and their early military victories in the war of 1814-16 raised the spectre of British defeat.<sup>12</sup> A contemporary report authored by Resident Richard Strachey suggests the implications that were read into these reversals. Though conceding the relatively unprecedented nature of the struggle, for Strachey it was a compelling manifestation of 'the precarious Nature of the British power in India, and shews the pressing necessity for adopting Measures for the purpose of counteracting the Perils of our Situation'.<sup>13</sup> The measures which Strachey had in view were military, and, in the long term, involved a significant expansion of the Company's military establishment. In the short term, Strachey suspected that 'the failure in the present Northern Campaign of our usual success attracts, naturally enough, the attention of those Governments [the independent states of India]'.<sup>14</sup> This led Strachey to argue that the war with the Gurkhas had to end (as in fact it did) with an overt demonstration of the Company's military might, in order to re-establish the Company's reputation in the eyes of the Indian states who eagerly registered the Company's defeats in the field.<sup>15</sup> Thinking ahead, Strachey concluded by observing that 'the present crisis shews that the Establishment of our Empire in India on a firmer Basis than that on which it now rests is indispensable to our future Safety. It further shews the necessity of maintaining, by a suitable effort, our character for superiority in Military Prowess'.<sup>16</sup> For Strachey and other Residents of his generation, the lessons learned from these encounters the subcontinent were clear; the Company's military predominance had to be actively maintained rather than passively assumed.

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<sup>9</sup> Sindhia notoriously adopted European military tactics; see Cooper, *Anglo-Maratha campaigns*, p. 10.

<sup>10</sup> Anonymous, *Considerations relative to the military establishments in India belonging to the British, and those of the native princes* (London, 1803), p. 10-11.

<sup>11</sup> C.T. Metcalfe, Notes on the Burman War, 8 Jun. 1824, Letters from Sir Charles Theophilus Metcalfe to Amherst, Papers of 1<sup>st</sup> Earl Amherst, Mss Eur F140/93, OIOC, np.

<sup>12</sup> John Pemble, *The invasion of Nepal: John Company at war* (Oxford, 1971), p. 356-357.

<sup>13</sup> Richard Strachey's report, 16 Mar. 1815, Notes and intelligence of Mountstuart Elphinstone regarding the Peshawar and Trimbackjee in the lead up to the Third Maratha War, Elphinstone Collection, Mss Eur F88/60, OIOC, p. 4.

<sup>14</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 5.

<sup>15</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 6.

<sup>16</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 7.

Strachey's fear that the Anglo-Nepalese War would stoke the fire of Indian opposition reflects the fact that the early nineteenth century was also a period fraught with recurring acts of open defiance. Resistance emanated from several quarters; in some cases, it was agitation within the army, as happened at Hyderabad in 1807 when sepoys in the subsidiary force were briefly required to wear turbans resembling European hats.<sup>17</sup> Often it was incited by members of the royal family, as for instance at Delhi when Prince Mirza Jahangir occupied the palace.<sup>18</sup> Just as frequently resistance was led by former ministers, as when Mohipat Ram rallied forces among disaffected landowners in the hinterlands of Hyderabad, or when the *diwan* of Travancore raised an army and led an attack on the Resident's household in the middle of the night.<sup>19</sup> These moments of agitation were short-lived and violently repressed, but, taking a broad view of the period, they cropped up persistently, reminding Residents, should they doubt it, that their influence in neighbouring Indian kingdoms was unwelcome. There were even accounts of peasants attacking Company troops as they passed through the countryside; during the upheaval of 1818 an army officer in the Nagpur area reported 'there can be no doubt of the Inhabitants being much disaffected towards us', citing for proof what he described as the massacre of a small party of sepoys at Shawpoor.<sup>20</sup> Henry Russell was similarly convinced that the rural parts of the Nizam's territories contained 'ample materials of Insurrection'.<sup>21</sup> For the Residents, this opposition to Company rule sometimes manifested itself more personally in assassination attempts. Preceding the outbreak of hostilities in 1817, Mountstuart Elphinstone was inundated with 'numerous reports & claims of plots, conspiracies, mutinies, assassinations'.<sup>22</sup> In tempestuous and unsettled Travancore, where the populace had always resisted the Rajah's alignment with the Company, the life of the Resident was regularly rumoured to be at risk.<sup>23</sup> The mutinous Nair battalions in the Rajah's service threatened to assassinate the Resident in 1804, while in 1806 the minister reputedly planned to poison him.<sup>24</sup>

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<sup>17</sup> Court of Directors to Fort St George Political Department, 29 May 1807, General Correspondence with India, IOR/E/4/900, OIOC, p. 56-57.

<sup>18</sup> Alexander Fraser to his mother, 23 Dec. 1810, Fraser of Reelig Papers, vol. 33, NRAS, p. 219.

<sup>19</sup> For Mohiput Ram, see Thomas Sydenham to Earl of Minto, 17 Apr. 1808, file no. 1, Foreign Secret Department Records, NAI, p. 1; for *diwan* of Travancore, see Court of Directors to the Government at Fort St George, 29 Sept. 1809, General Correspondence with India, IOR/E/4/904, OIOC, p. 203.

<sup>20</sup> A. Cumming to R. Becker, 30 Jul. 1818, BC, IOR/F/4/619/15425, OIOC, p. 107-108; Richard Jenkins to John Adam, 29 Jul. 1818, BC, IOR/F/4/619/15425, OIOC, p. 27-28.

<sup>21</sup> Henry Russell to John Adam, 19 Nov. 1817, Papers of Mountstuart Elphinstone regarding the Nizam, Elphinstone Collection, Mss Eur F88/405, OIOC, p. 84.

<sup>22</sup> 22 Oct. 1817, Journal of Mountstuart Elphinstone, Elphinstone Collection, Mss Eur F88/370, OIOC, p. 27. See also 22 Feb. 1817, *ibid.*, p. 18-19.

<sup>23</sup> Fort St George Political Department to John Munro, 10 Aug. 1814, General Correspondence with India, IOR/E/4/914, OIOC, p. 178-179.

<sup>24</sup> Attempted poisoning of Lt. Col. Colin Macaulay, General Correspondence with India, IOR/E/4/904, OIOC, p. 235; 282.

Alongside acts of open resistance were less clearly defined incidents of raiding and plunder. Residents were regularly plagued with complaints from frontier officials in British India about banditti who pillaged Company territory and then escaped into princely dominions where they could not be pursued without permission from the ruler in question.<sup>25</sup> Sometimes these acts of looting seemed to take place with the implicit support of regional officials, and there was even a suspicion that they were encouraged at the higher levels of government as a form of opposition to the Company. These suspicions were sharpened by the fact that many of these marauders were mercenary soldiers in the pay of Indian rulers. Acts of pillaging and plunder, as Stewart Gordon has shown, were a traditional way for out-of-work soldiers to support themselves; this aspect of the Indian military economy became particularly pronounced as the introduction of subsidiary forces into Indian kingdoms drove many Indian soldiers out of work.<sup>26</sup> British officials were certainly aware of this pattern, but suspected that the Indian elite were encouraging, rather than obstructing, these depredations.

This burgeoning doubt is evident in the letters of Richard Strachey. While Resident with Daulat Rao Sindhia, a great deal of Strachey's correspondence was devoted to coordinating efforts between the Company's army and Sindhia's subalterns to capture thieves and murderers who had fled Company forces and sheltered in Sindhia's territory. Strachey appears to have oscillated in his opinion of these assaults, on the one hand holding Sindhia responsible given that most of these men were members of his army, on the other recognizing the limited authority which Sindhia actually enjoyed over his frontiers. In 1812, in a letter to a captain in the Company's army, Strachey firmly declared his belief in Sindhia's good faith, assuring Captain Popham that although criminals sheltering in the ravines on Sindhia's border were rarely captured, this failure was not owing to any ill will on the part of Sindhia's *darbar* but instead could be attributed to the lack of police in those districts, and the recalcitrance of local *zamindars*.<sup>27</sup> By 1813 however Strachey was beginning to feel that 'no consideration of the Faults of his Administration can be allowed in excuse for hostile Attacks of his Troops'.<sup>28</sup> Cases such as these blurred the line between acts of war and acts of pillaging. It brought into

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<sup>25</sup> See for example correspondence about robberies committed in Travancore and Cochin by armed plunderers, Sept. 1819-Jan. 1821, BC, IOR/F/4/778/21037, OIOC; for robberies on the borders of Awadh see H. Colebrooke to G.F. Cherry, 2 Jun. 1798, Letters received by the agent to the Governor-General at Benares, Benares Residency Records, basta no. 10, book no. 42, UPSAA, p. 236; J. Collins to W.A. Brooke, 5 Jan. 1807, Letters received by the agent to the Governor-General at Benares, Benares Residency Records, UPSAA, p. 202. For descriptions of pillaging in central India see Marquess of Hastings, 'Political state of India 1815', HM, IOR/H/603, OIOC, p. 104.

<sup>26</sup> Stewart Gordon, 'Scarf and sword: Thugs, marauders, and state-formation in eighteenth-century Malwa', in *Marathas, marauders, and state formation in eighteenth-century India* (Delhi, 1994), p. 19-20.

<sup>27</sup> Richard Strachey to Capt. Popham, 28 Nov. 1812, Richard Strachey Papers, Mss Eur D514/1, OIOC, p. 138.

<sup>28</sup> Richard Strachey to John Adam, 12 Jun. 1813, John Adam Papers, Mss Eur D585, OIOC, p. 81-82.

question the effectuality of negotiation and peace treaties; after all, if the Company's supposed allies could not control their troops, there was little point in diplomacy.

The prevalence of this kind of opposition and unrest created a climate of uncertainty, inspiring feelings of vulnerability which in turn produced a strong militaristic bent within the political line. Yet, to fully explicate the Residents commitment to coercive measures, it is also necessary to understand the intellectual and cultural frameworks through which they apprehended this turbulence in the subcontinent. Developing convictions about Company 'paramountcy', that is, the Company's superiority and assumed right to intervene, had ideological underpinnings; these beliefs were rooted in assumptions about military culture, the law of nations, and the appropriate forms of political conduct. The following section will explain why Residents were so pessimistic about the possibility or desirability of an equal alliance with Indian powers, and why they instead preferred the asymmetry of the subsidiary system, underpinned by the threat of force.

## **2. The cultural coordinates of the subsidiary alliance system**

Though Wellesley and Hastings's aggressive policies had many supporters, not all Residents necessarily had a rosy view of their prospects in the subcontinent, nor was British expansion celebrated without a hint of ambivalence. Many prominent members of the political line, perhaps consonant with the cyclical understanding of history prevalent during this period, anticipated the Company's ultimate downfall, which, though perhaps not imminent, they nevertheless considered inevitable.<sup>29</sup> In 1805, following the Company's victory in the Second Maratha War, Mountstuart Elphinstone predicted that 'India will most likely go as France & America did before'.<sup>30</sup> As William Palmer remarked in a private letter to Warren Hastings, '[t]hat an Empire so extensive including many Millions of men to whom our Religion, Laws, Manners & even our very Faces are abhorrent, can be governed to the effects of augmenting the National Wealth & power, [...] I have met with no man so sanguine as to expect.'<sup>31</sup> In his private letters to his father, Henry Russell similarly expressed the conviction that 'our Power in India, like the ripple of a stone thrown into the water, is destined to be lost in its Expansion', remarking that 'I do not believe that our vast Indian Empire will form a single Exception to the Rule of all the Empires since the world began.'<sup>32</sup>

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<sup>29</sup> David Spadafora, *The idea of progress in eighteenth-century Britain* (New Haven, CT, 1990), p. 14-15.

<sup>30</sup> Mountstuart Elphinstone to John Adam, 5 Nov. 1805, John Adam Papers, Mss Eur F109/89, OIOC, np.

<sup>31</sup> William Palmer to Warren Hastings, 29 Dec. 1804, Official and private correspondence of Warren Hastings, Add MS 29180, BL, p. 76.

<sup>32</sup> Henry Russell to Henry Russell Sr., 6 Mar. 1818, Russell Papers, MS. Eng. lett. c. 151, Bodl. Oxf., p. 215; Henry Russell to Henry Russell Sr., 22 Aug. 1818, *ibid.*, p. 241.

Despite these mixed feelings regarding British expansion, the Residents almost universally advocated for greater intervention and a more coercive style of rule. Impositions backed by the threat of force were considered the most efficacious, indeed only means of safeguarding the Company's position in the subcontinent. Mountstuart Elphinstone was convinced that the alliance system could not be substantially improved, and said as much when the Marquess of Hastings approached him about the possibility of reform. In an ideal world, according to Elphinstone, the Company's alliance with independent Indian powers would be an alliance of equals, founded in mutual trust and respect, without political intervention on either side. Yet the character of the Indian rulers in question, as Elphinstone saw them, appeared to make such an arrangement impracticable:

their restlessness, their rapacity, their weakness and the general want of confidence in them that results from their want of faith, continually bring them into situations where we are forced to interfere, either to save them from utter ruin or to prevent their making our power instrumental to their injustice and oppression.<sup>33</sup>

The traits which Elphinstone identified, namely, rapacity, weakness, and want of faith, are implicit in many of the Residents' descriptions of the Indian elite.<sup>34</sup> According to this vision, Indian administrations had to be controlled if they were going to make for effective instruments of British imperial interests.

These stereotypes of Indian polities were partly a product of what might be described as a clash of military cultures. Conceptions of legitimate violence are to some extent historically contingent and culturally conditioned; ideas about what forms of violence are appropriate, and under what conditions, differ across space and time.<sup>35</sup> The Residents' reactions to Indian methods of waging war were shaped by their own models of how conflicts should properly be conducted, leading them to classify the Marathas in particular as outlaws and brigands.<sup>36</sup> From a European perspective, pitched battles limited damage, constituting a relatively civilized means of resolving conflicts; the Marathas' preference for mobile, 'irregular' warfare, their reliance on light cavalry, and their use of tactics like cutting supply lines and ravaging surrounding territories thus elicited the condemnation of prominent

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<sup>33</sup> All quotes Mountstuart Elphinstone to Marquess of Hastings, 17 Jul. 1815, Papers and correspondence of Mountstuart Elphinstone regarding the Deccan, Elphinstone Collection, Mss Eur F88/403, OIOC, p. 156.

<sup>34</sup> See also for example Henry Russell to C.T. Metcalfe, 15 May 1819, Papers of Mountstuart Elphinstone regarding the Nizam, Elphinstone Collection, OIOC, p. 61.

<sup>35</sup> See introduction to *New world orders: Violence, sanction, and authority in the colonial Americas*, eds. John Smolenski and Thomas J. Humphrey (Philadelphia, PA, 2005), p. 12.

<sup>36</sup> According to Barry Close, the Marathas 'lead rather bands of robbers, than collected and substantial armies.' Memorandum of Colonel Barry Close, Minto Papers, MS 11323, NLS, p. 31. See also Report on the Deckan, Elphinstone Collection, Mss Eur F88/219, OIOC, p. 11.

officials within the Company.<sup>37</sup> Particularly problematic, in the Company's view, were escalating incidences of armed plunder within Maratha domains. Pillaging was, as Stewart Gordon argued, a key method of accumulating resources and maintaining standing armies in central India, and in a context where many Indian kingdoms were critically underfunded owing to bad harvests and Company debts, it was difficult to pay for military support in any other way.<sup>38</sup> Company officials, however, condemned Indian rulers for their seeming indifference to the depredations of armed bandits within their own territories, arguing that the Marathas sacrificed the wellbeing of their subjects in the interests of keeping a pool of mounted military labour close at hand without having to pay directly for the privilege. Resident Richard Jenkins observed censoriously that Nagpur and the surrounding regions were hard hit by these depredations: 'indeed all these territories are overrun by them, and never free from their parties so great is their confidence of not being attacked, and so little are the Exertions of the Government to protect its miserable subjects'.<sup>39</sup>

This kind of behaviour was perceived to warrant forceful intervention. British attitudes on this point were heavily informed by classical understandings of 'tyranny', a concept which encompassed various forms of misgovernment but generally implied either active brutality or a passive disregard for the safety and wellbeing of the population.<sup>40</sup> In a European context, 'tyranny' had historically been a powerful justification for military intervention.<sup>41</sup> Similarly, for British officials who espoused such views, the logical conclusion was that the Company would be doing the Indian population a service through their intervention. Thomas Sydenham, describing conditions in Hyderabad, proclaimed that 'the cultivators of the soil, the manufacturers, artisans and merchants groan under a load of exactions and oppressions, and would willingly be transferred to the British government'.<sup>42</sup> In even more moralizing terms, William Palmer condemned Sindhia and the Peshwa for being 'wholly regardless of the happiness of the people committed to their charge, & destitute of

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<sup>37</sup> For European perspectives, see James Q. Whitman, *The verdict of battle* (Cambridge, MA, 2012), p. 3-17. On Indian military tactics, see Kaushik Roy, *The Oxford companion to modern warfare in India: From the eighteenth century to present times* (Oxford, 2009), p. 19-21.

<sup>38</sup> Gordon, 'Scarf and sword', p. 19-20.

<sup>39</sup> Richard Jenkins to Capt. Roughsedge, 29 Dec. 1813, Letter books of Sir Richard Jenkins, Mss Eur E111, IOR, p. 203. See also William Palmer to Marquess Wellesley, 13 Feb. 1801, Correspondence of William Palmer, HM, IOR/H/576, OIOC, p. 590-591.

<sup>40</sup> For definition of 'tyranny' see Emer de Vattel, *The law of nations, or, the principles of the law of nature, applied to the conduct and affairs of nations and sovereigns*, ed. Béla Kapossy and Richard Whatmore (Indianapolis, IN, 2008), book I, chapter IV, section 49.

<sup>41</sup> David Trim, 'Intervention in European history, c. 1520-1850', in *Just and unjust military intervention: European thinkers from Vitoria to Mill*, eds. Stefano Recchia and Jennifer M. Welsh (Cambridge, 2013), p. 26.

<sup>42</sup> Thomas Sydenham to Minto, 21 Apr. 1801, Foreign Secret Department Records, file no. 1, NAI, p. 24. Sydenham made exception for 'the lower orders of Mussulmans', who he claimed 'detest us and abuse us, because we are Christians and are powerful.'



any sense of moral Obligation’, while Mountstuart Elphinstone proclaimed that ‘it is a satisfaction to think that we are engaged in a holy war against violence and rapine & there is not one of our enemies whose destruction will not be a blessing to India as it relieves the country from his crimes.’<sup>43</sup> Violence against Indian princes was supposedly justified since they themselves were a violent people, swayed by the rule of the sword rather than the rule of law. In support of this view, commentators also emphasized that many Indian rulers then dominant in the subcontinent had come to power through conquest. To quote two contemporary observers, ‘all the Mahomedan [powers] have been founded in rebellion, crime and usurpation’, while the Marathas were described as ‘an empire which has arisen on the basis of injustice, falsehood, and treachery’.<sup>44</sup> These visions of Indian brutality were reinforced by widely circulated horror stories about the Black Hole of Calcutta and Tipu Sultan’s treatment of British captives.<sup>45</sup> Drawing on theories of the law of nations elaborated by influential thinkers like Emer de Vattel, many Britons (the Residents among them) felt that their common humanity authorised them to combat the oppressions of tyrants.

This concept of ‘humanity’ was also regularly invoked. One might expect that ideas of shared humanity would mitigate against violent or coercive measures, and indeed natural law has traditionally been associated with a more open and inclusive notion of the international community, in contrast to the state-centred, positivist tradition of the nineteenth century.<sup>46</sup> At the same time, ‘humanity’ could also function as an exclusionary category, and the idea that Indian enemies were for one reason or another outside the bounds of humanity was regularly given as a justification for extra-legal forms of justice. This was a common motif of European political propaganda in the eighteenth and early nineteenth century, in which the enemies of the state were constructed as morally deficient barbarians excluded from the civilized European community.<sup>47</sup> Dan Edelstein has illustrated how conceptions of the laws of nature could give rise to this idea of outlaws and enemies of humanity which in

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<sup>43</sup> William Palmer to Warren Hastings, 10 Jul. 1801, Add MS 29178, Correspondence and Papers of Warren Hastings, BL, p. 63; Mountstuart Elphinstone to John Adam, 29 Mar. 1805, Papers of John Adam, Mss Eur F109/88, OIOC, np.

<sup>44</sup> John Clunes, *An historical sketch of the princes of India, stipendiary, subsidiary, protected, tributary, and feudatory; with a sketch of the origin and progress of British power in India* (Edinburgh, 1833), p. 18; An officer, *Origin of the Pindaries*, p. 34.

<sup>45</sup> Kate Teltscher, “‘The fearful name of the Black Hole’: Fashioning an imperial myth’, in *Writing India 1757-1990: The literature of British India*, ed. Bart Moore-Gilbert (Manchester, 1996), p. 40; Kate Teltscher, *India inscribed: European and British writing on India 1600-1800* (Delhi, 1995), p. 229; 233.

<sup>46</sup> Famously in the South Asian context by C.H. Alexandrowicz, *An introduction to the history of the law of nations in the East Indies (16<sup>th</sup>, 17<sup>th</sup>, and 18<sup>th</sup> centuries)* (Oxford, 1967), p. 2.

<sup>47</sup> Renaud Morieux, ‘Patriotisme humanitaire et prisonniers de guerre en France et en Angleterre pendant la Révolution française et l’Empire’, in *La politique par les armes. Conflits internationaux et politisation, XVe-XIXe siècles*, eds. Laurent Bourquin et al. (Rennes, 2014), p.301-16; David A. Bell, *The cult of the nation in France: Inventing nationalism, 1680-1800* (Cambridge, MA, 2001), p. 84.

turn laid the ideological groundwork for brutal acts of summary justice. In France, he argued, these categories were used to justify the violence meted out during the Terror and the war in the Vendée.<sup>48</sup> Philip Dwyer has similarly observed how massacres during the Revolutionary and Napoleonic Wars were accompanied by dehumanizing rhetoric which labelled the enemy as vagabonds, brigands, bandits, and beasts, categories which exempted them from the normal rules of warfare.<sup>49</sup> The same logic applied in India, particularly with regards to the Pindaris, who, during the upheavals of 1816-18, were subject to summary trial and execution in the field if found guilty of 'depredations'.<sup>50</sup> These disciplinary measures were considered necessary to curb the 'inhuman barbarities' of the Pindaris, 'whose progress is generally marked by the smoking ruins of villages, the shrieks of women, and the groans of their mutilated husbands.'<sup>51</sup>

Ongoing conflicts between Indian powers were also understood to require the Company's pacifying intervention, and thus were seized on as a further legitimation for increasing the Company's military presence. From the very earliest days of the subsidiary alliance system, the maintenance of orderly borders was presented as a key objective of the Company's growing intervention in the affairs of Indian kingdoms. In response to Indian border disputes, the Company positioned itself as the ultimate political arbiter in the subcontinent, committed to ensuring a so-called 'balance of power' conducive to peace, stability, and trade. It was the Company's explicit policy to 'convince the several powers of India that their real interest consists in respecting the rights of their neighbours, and in cultivating their own resources within the limits of their several territories'.<sup>52</sup> Parallels were drawn with Britain's perceived role in European politics, and its opposition to the rise of French or Spanish land-based empires; similarly, in India the Company identified itself as the champion of smaller kingdoms, particularly the Rajputs, against the depredations of the rival Maratha empire.<sup>53</sup> By imposing clear borders, British officials claimed to be civilizing and disciplining the Indian landscape, curbing 'the lawless ambition, predatory habits, and restless

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<sup>48</sup> Dan Edelstein, *The terror of natural right: Republicanism, the cult of nature, and the French Revolution* (Chicago, IL, 2010), p. 15-21.

<sup>49</sup> Philip G. Dwyer, 'Violence and the revolutionary and Napoleonic wars: massacre, conquest and the imperial enterprise', *Journal of Genocide Research*, 15:2 (2013): 117-131.

<sup>50</sup> Richard Jenkins to Alexander Walker, 23 Dec. 1816, Letter books of Sir Richard Jenkins, Mss Eur E111, OIOC, p. 367; Papers of Mountstuart Elphinstone relating to the rupture in India in 1817, Elphinstone Collection, Mss Eur F88/57, OIOC, p. 5.

<sup>51</sup> An officer, *Origin of the Pindaries*, p. 121.

<sup>52</sup> Marquess Wellesley to J.A. Kirkpatrick, 8 Jul. 1798, *Wellesley despatches*, vol. I, p. 104.

<sup>53</sup> Richard Whatmore, "'Neither masters nor slaves': small states and empire in the long eighteenth century', in *Lineages of empire: The historical roots of British imperial thought*, ed. Duncan Kelly (Oxford, 2009), p. 754.

violence of the native states of Hindostan and the Dekan'.<sup>54</sup> British paramountcy was understood as the most efficient means of restoring order to a disorderly land.<sup>55</sup>

Residents posited practical as well as moral reasons for their asymmetrical alliance system. In their view, the disorganized state of Indian governments made them practically ineffective as allies, meaning they had to be actively controlled rather than passively trusted. Indian armies were, it was said, ill-administered and unruly; Residents regularly complained that Company armies were forced to do the worst of the fighting, with little or no assistance from their Indian allies.<sup>56</sup> Ongoing unrest in Indian states, which rulers were apparently unwilling or unable to control, brought their military capabilities further into question. The Company routinely found themselves resorting to military measures to quell rebellions in neighbouring territories which threatened to spread to their own subjects.<sup>57</sup> The general feeling, therefore, was that the impotence of Indian states was more dangerous to the Company than direct attack; 'the ills arisen from their weakness, and bad policy, have not been much less than those which we might have feared from their hostility.'<sup>58</sup>

Similarly, the perceived fickleness of Indian rulers led Residents to suggest that they could not be trusted to hold to a single line of conduct, but were instead liable to be swayed by the insinuations of conniving ministers. Thomas Sydenham was 'not disposed to place any Confidence in the Friendship or Constancy of the present Nizam [Sikander Jah]', observing that 'his sentiments and Feelings, on all subjects, are generally directed by those who surround him'.<sup>59</sup> John Malcolm was similarly convinced that Baji Rao lacked the 'firmness to resist any bold or wicked counsellor', and even went so far as to speculate that it was 'this prominent defect in his character which has rendered him from the first, so uncertain and

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<sup>54</sup> Anonymous, *Notes relative to the peace concluded between the British Government and the Marhatta chieftains, and to the various questions arising out of the terms of the pacification* (London, 1805), p. 37.

<sup>55</sup> Richard Jenkins to Marquess of Hastings, 5 Sept. 1816, Cleveland Public Library Papers, IOR Neg 4226, wq091.92 Ea77p5, OIOC, p. 458.

<sup>56</sup> Henry Russell to C.T. Metcalfe, 15 May 1819, Papers of Mountstuart Elphinstone regarding the Nizam, Elphinstone Collection, Mss Eur F88/405, OIOC, p. 62; Mountstuart Elphinstone to Thomas Hislop, 30 Mar. 1815, Correspondence regarding the Pindaris, HM, IOR/H/600, OIOC, p. 54; N.B. Edmonstone to Barry Close, 23 Jun. 1802, Papers concerning the Treaty of Bassein (1802) and the Maratha War, HM, IOR/H/620, OIOC, p. 53.

<sup>57</sup> Richard Jenkins to Marquess of Hastings, 5 Sept. 1816, Cleveland Public Library Papers, IOR Neg 4226, wq091.92 Ea77p5, OIOC, p. 408-409.

<sup>58</sup> Marquess of Hastings, 'Political state of India 1815', HM, IOR/H/603, OIOC, p. 50. See also Richard Jenkins to Marquess of Hastings, 5 Sept. 1816, Cleveland Public Library Papers, IOR Neg 4226, wq091.92 Ea77p5, OIOC, p. 407.

<sup>59</sup> J.A. Kirkpatrick to Minto, 21 Apr. 1801, Foreign Secret Department, file no. 1, NAI, p. 19.

dangerous an Ally to the British Government'.<sup>60</sup> Credulous rulers of this type could turn against the Company at a moment's notice.

These recurring descriptions of 'wicked counsellors' were part and parcel of British stereotypes of the Indian political elite as cunning and devious. Based on these assumptions, many contemporaries were convinced that Indian intrigues could only be held in check by the threat of violence. This stereotype was particularly associated with the Marathas. As an anonymous author put it in a contemporary text, 'no power ever placed confidence in them, without ultimately having reason to repent of its credulity.'<sup>61</sup> This was an opinion regularly expressed by the Residents, too. William Palmer, Resident at Poona, alleged that 'violence and perfidy are the usual means employed and injustice the end proposed in all the transactions of the Mahratta people.'<sup>62</sup> Mountstuart Elphinstone, one of Palmer's successors at Poona, described at length in his private journal his 'hatred of the Marattas perhaps of the Indians in general & my disgust at their [...] want of faith & principles'.<sup>63</sup> As this complaint of Elphinstone's attests, British officials widely commented on a lack of public faith among Indian rulers, and did not trust them to hold to binding agreements. When the Governor-General the Earl of Minto asked Colonel Barry Close, then Resident at Poona, to report on the likelihood of Indian rulers supporting the British in the event of a French invasion, Close responded by asking 'what reliance could be placed on a *Maratha* chief [...] totally ignorant of the principles of Government, and of the use of probity, faith, or credit, and who knows no policy but that of violence, fraud, deceit, & monetary gain'.<sup>64</sup> These accusations of bad faith had serious implications, for in the European tradition public faith was the very cornerstone of the law of nations itself, without which, as Emer de Vattel put it, 'treaties are no better than empty words'.<sup>65</sup> Public faith made negotiation, and by extension peaceful co-existence, possible. Indeed, Grotius concluded his influential text on the laws of war and peace by admonishing princes to keep their faith: 'wherefore take away Faith, they will be like wild

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<sup>60</sup> John Malcolm to John Adam, 31 Aug. 1818, Copies of correspondence of Brigadier General Sir John Malcolm, Political and Secret Department Records, IOR/L/PS/19/2, OIOC, np. Daulat Rao Sindhia was also described as having a 'weak and wavering mind' under 'the entire ascendancy of Sirji Rao Ghautka, his father-in-law. N.B. Edmonstone to Barry Close, 4 Dec. 1804, Wellesley Papers, Add MS 13603, OIOC, p. 19.

<sup>61</sup> Godfrey Charles Mundy, *Pen and pencil sketches, being the journal of a tour in India*, 2 vols., (London, 1832), vol. II, p. 47. See also Thomas Duer Broughton, *Letters written in a Mahratta camp during the year 1809* (London, 1813), p. 104-105.

<sup>62</sup> William Palmer to Marquess Wellesley, 25 Mar. 1799, in *Poona records*, vol. VI, p. 375.

<sup>63</sup> 4 Feb. 1817, Journal of Mountstuart Elphinstone, Elphinstone Collection, Mss Eur F88/370, OIOC, p. 17.

<sup>64</sup> Memorandum of Colonel Barry Close, 31 Aug. 1808, Minto Papers, MS 11323, NLS, p. 31-32.

<sup>65</sup> Vattel, *The law of nations*, book II, chapter XV, section 219.

Beasts, whose Rage all Men dread.’<sup>66</sup> British perceptions of Indian lack of public faith meant that political negotiations with Indian powers were apt to be viewed as more or less empty exercises, rendered futile by the supposed insincerity of Indian political elites.

There was a parallel line of interpretation, however, which attributed Indian ‘lack of faith’ less to an inherent Indian character, than to the unequal power dynamic embodied in Anglo-Indian relationships. Divided opinion on this question reflected broader uncertainties in eighteenth- and early-nineteenth-century legal theory, particularly on the question of whether states were obliged to keep promises that had been made under duress.<sup>67</sup> It was not infrequently conceded or implied that the reason why Indian rulers could not be trusted was that they had been coerced into alliances in which they were subordinate partners. This was an opinion commonly expressed by critics of the Company in the context of the parliamentary inquiry into Marquess Wellesley’s activities in India, which focused on his alliance with the Peshwa and his subsequent conflict with the Marathas. In a pamphlet commenting on Wellesley’s system of subsidiary alliances, the anonymous author argued that ‘where one party enters into such engagements with reluctance or by constraint, the advantages to be expected from such an alliance will not be realized, because the reluctant or the constrained party can never be relied upon in the hour of danger’, and would, moreover, be ‘constantly upon the watch for an opportunity of emancipating themselves whenever the tide of affairs should chance to turn against us’.<sup>68</sup>

In line with this interpretation, some Residents conceded that it was natural for Indian rulers to seek to free themselves from an unwanted alliance which impinged on their sovereign status. Writing in 1803 on the eve of the Second Maratha War, William Scott (Resident at Lucknow) anticipated that the Peshwa of Poona would either abandon his alliance with the British in favour of joining the enemy Maratha alliance, or that he would be deserted by his troops and followers. Scott’s fears were founded in the belief, apparently ‘generally admitted’, that the Indian rulers who allied with the Company did so out of fear of Holkar and Sindhia’s depredations, but might recognize with the passage of time ‘that these oppressions were temporary and may be rescinded, whilst our authority and influence when

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<sup>66</sup> Hugo Grotius, *The rights of war and peace*, 3 vols., ed. Richard Tuck (Indianapolis, IN, 2005), vol. III, chap. xxv, section I.

<sup>67</sup> Samuel Pufendorf, *De jure naturae et gentium libri octo*, 1688 edn., 2 vols., trans. C.H. Oldfather and W.A. Oldfather (Oxford, 1934), book III, chapter VI, section 272; Christian Wolff, *Jus gentium method scientifica pertractatum*, 3 vols., trans. Joseph H. Drake (Oxford, 1934), vol. II, chap IV, section 434-435.

<sup>68</sup> S.J., ‘Cursory remarks on the late proceedings with respect to the Marhattas’, 26 Feb. 1806, Papers concerning political, military, administrative and legal matters, HM, IOR/H/481, OIOC, p. 907-908; 923.

once established become permanent and our encroachments progressive'.<sup>69</sup> Similarly, in a memorandum written in response to Governor-General Minto's query about whether or not the Maratha powers were likely to ally with the French upon the occasion of a French invasion, Colonel Close admitted that 'it might betray a want of knowledge of human nature, to suppose that the Maratta Chieftains [...] do not regret their heavy losses from the late war, are not jealous of our superior power, and anxious to regain the relative levels, from which they have respectively fallen.'<sup>70</sup> Richard Jenkins echoed this sentiment in a report written on the eve of the Pindari War; describing the Marathas' feelings of frustration and humiliation at their loss of independence, Jenkins concluded that 'it is not in human nature for such feelings to be subdued, by any show, or reality of moderation, by any thing, in fact, short of a thorough conviction of the hopelessness of ever recovering their former dominion'. It was Jenkins's opinion that the Marathas would ever be willing to rebel, however minimal their chances, 'so that they can shake the pillars of the edifice, which overshadows them, they will overlook the chance of being buried in its ruins'.<sup>71</sup> In this light, far from being somehow 'inhuman', the Maratha chieftains were, to the contrary, deeply human in their desire to preserve their position of independence and influence in the subcontinent.

These opposing perspectives on the question of Indian public faith are connected to a deeper ambiguity at the heart of contemporary understandings of the law of nations, which was in brief that the dictates of the law of nature and the self-interest of sovereign states were sometimes diametrically opposed. Given that the preservation of the state was itself agreed to be of primary importance according to natural law, how far were governments allowed to go in pursuit of that end, and to what extent were they permitted to break with other tenets of the law of nations? Isaac Nakhimovsky has identified this tension in Emer de Vattel, a paradox which, he argues, has led to opposite interpretations of the text. On the one hand, states were supposedly authorised to punish inhumanity and injustice. On the other hand, sovereign states were supposed to be equals with no right to sit in judgement of one another, since their judgement might be informed by their own self-interests.<sup>72</sup> To quote Vattel himself, 'each party asserting that they have justice on their own side, will arrogate to themselves all the rights of war, and maintain that their enemy has none, that his hostilities are so many acts of robbery, so many infractions of the law of nations, in the punishment of which all states

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<sup>69</sup> William Scott to Robinson, 24 Aug. 1803, Letters from Col. William Scott, Papers of Sir George Abercrombie Robinson, Mss Eur F142/8, OIOC, np.

<sup>70</sup> Memorandum of Colonel Barry Close, 31 Aug. 1808, Minto Papers, MS 11323, NLS, p. 28.

<sup>71</sup> Richard Jenkins to Marquess of Hastings, 5 Sept. 1816, Cleveland Public Library Papers, IOR Neg 4226, wq091.92 Ea77p5, OIOC, p. 442-443.

<sup>72</sup> Isaac Nakhimovsky, 'Carl Schmitt, Vattel and the law of nations: between Enlightenment and Revolution', *Grotiana*, 31:1 (2010): 141-164.

should unite.’<sup>73</sup> As Stefano Recchia and Jennifer Welsh observe, military interventions always, to some extent, contravene ideals of self-determination and political independence which have historically been central to the law of nations. Interventions bring into question, not just motives and means, but also the issue of right authority, in other words, who has the right to determine the legitimacy of an intervention?<sup>74</sup> Many senior British officials certainly presumed this right to declare the justice or injustice of Indian acts of war, which they generally impugned as ‘depredations’, but this interpretation did not go totally uncontested. Charles Grant, a vocal opponent of military conquest in the Company’s Court of Directors, highlighted this difference of interpretation when he pointed out that, though in the eyes of the Company the Marathas ‘were immediately the aggressors, and they little scrupled the violation of treaties’, the Marathas might for their part ‘consider us the first aggressors, and themselves as originally the injured parties’.<sup>75</sup>

Finally, at least one Resident did draw the connection between the Company’s encroachment and what contemporaries perceived as Indian misgovernment. Henry Russell was explicit on this subject, observing that ‘an alliance with us, upon the subsidiary system, however it may contribute to the advancement of our own Power, leads inevitably to the ultimate Destruction of the state which embraces it’. Specifically, Russell complained that the Company’s intervention stifled competition among the Indian courtly elite, precluding the development of political expertise and administrative know-how. Residents were generally instructed to shore up the authority of pliant ministers to perpetuate the Company’s influence and ensure political stability, but in so doing, Russell felt, the Company were in fact creating the very conditions of disorganization and political stagnation at Indian courts which they so vociferously condemned. At the same time, even Russell believed the Company’s withdrawal from Hyderabad would, in his words, ‘be productive of the Subversion of the Government’. As he put it, ‘all the Functions of Administration would be dissolved, the Fabrick of Government would sink under its own weakness, and the Nizam himself would probably become the victim of an insurrection of his subjects, and the country be made a scene of anarchy & outrage’.<sup>76</sup> In Russell’s opinion, only the direct intervention of the Resident could prevent the kingdom of Hyderabad from descending into chaos.

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<sup>73</sup> Vattel, *The law of nations*, book III, chapter XII, section 188.

<sup>74</sup> Stefano Recchia and Jennifer M. Welsh, ‘Introduction: The enduring relevance of classical thinkers’, in *Just and unjust military intervention: European thinkers from Vitoria to Mill*, eds. Stefano Recchia and Jennifer M. Welsh (Cambridge, 2013), p. 2.

<sup>75</sup> ‘Debate at the East-India House, February 3 1819’, *Asiatic Journal and Monthly Register* (Jan.-Jun. 1819), vol. VII, p. 276.

<sup>76</sup> All quotes in this paragraph from Henry Russell’s report, 24 Nov. 1819, Papers of John Adam, Mss Eur F109/9, OIOC, np.

To some extent, then, even Residents who seem to have eschewed the language of tyranny and Oriental despotism nevertheless felt they had a moral imperative to intervene. This imperative was even more deeply felt given that the Company had long meddled in Indian governments to serve its own interests; given these precedents, how could they not intervene to serve the broader good, as they saw it? As Charles Metcalfe put it in his defence of the Company's involvement in the affairs of Hyderabad, 'if it be right to interfere, in behalf of our own Interests, by imposing a Minister on the country, it cannot surely be wrong, to interpose for the Interests of the People with a view to their protection against his Rapacity.'<sup>77</sup> Jenkins was similarly of the opinion that the Marathas, at least, 'have been injured from whatever circumstances, beyond the possibility of reparation, or of reconciliation'.<sup>78</sup> As sociologist Charles Maier observed, 'empire does not emerge as a fit of absence of mind. Instead it represents a fit of what social scientists call path dependency, that is, clinging to choices made early on whose reversal seems unthinkable.'<sup>79</sup> Rather than being entirely in favour of sustaining or further expanding imperial projects, some Residents expressed the view that the Company had to continue along its set trajectory simply because they saw no way in which the Company could responsibly withdraw from the crisis of states it had created in India.

Although Residents were thus not necessarily optimistic about the future in store for their expanding empire in India, a few key ideas and assumptions nevertheless convinced them of the desirability of forcefully intervening in the politics of ostensibly independent Indian states. Not only were British and Indian military cultures starkly opposed, but British conceptions of 'tyranny', 'inhumanity', and the 'balance of powers' combined to make up a potent moral justification of the Company's military presence. These concerns were overlaid with pragmatic considerations about the perceived ineffectiveness and untrustworthiness of Indian states as allies, even though some Residents conceded that the apparent treachery and weaknesses they observed in Indian administrations were traceable to the Company's intervention. Although the Company's role in Indian states raised difficult questions about the laws of nations, for instance, about the binding power of treaties made under duress, and the relative priority to be accorded to *raison d'état* over the law of nature, Residents were generally satisfied with the rectitude of the Company's interference. Richard Jenkins for one felt that an article of 'authoritative interference' ought to be introduced into any future

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<sup>77</sup> C.T. Metcalfe to George Swinton, 31 Aug. 1822, Papers of John Adam, Mss Eur F109/9, OIOC, np.

<sup>78</sup> Richard Jenkins to Marquess of Hastings, 5 Sept. 1816, Cleveland Public Library Papers, IOR Neg 4226, wq091.92 Ea77p5, OIOC, p. 442.

<sup>79</sup> Charles Maier, *Among empires: American ascendancy and its predecessors* (Cambridge, MA, 2007), p. 21.



treaties, arguing that ‘we must almost Entirely new model the Marhatta Governments if we wish to make anything of them, conducive to the settlement & peace of India.’<sup>80</sup> To the extent that these ideas were made explicit in writing, they were rarely disputed by the Residents’ superiors in London and Calcutta; rather, it was on the question of how these ideas were to be put into practice that opinions differed. The following section will address how these convictions about the relationships between the East India Company and its nominal allies affected Residency business.

### 3. Manifestations in diplomatic practice

While militarism was an accepted feature of Company culture, what made the Residents’ views problematic, from the perspective of administrators in Calcutta and London, was that they encouraged an aggressive line of action which was not in keeping with diplomatic conventions. In European diplomatic practice, the expectation was for ambassadors to avoid domestic political entanglements in order to leave their principals room for manoeuvre. Ambassadors were supposed to observe, report, and generally influence the course of events in a way that left their superiors in office the greatest scope for agency. According to de Wicquefort’s instructions, ‘the Ambassador ought chiefly to take care not to engage himself, without express Orders, in Negotiations, the Consequences whereof may be of great Importance, and the Success uncertain.’<sup>81</sup> Rather than allowing their own feelings and opinions to dictate their behaviour, diplomatic representatives were expected to be non-committal and accommodating, and to cultivate as much as possible harmony between states.<sup>82</sup> To quote de Callière’s influential manual on the art of diplomacy, ‘he ought to be as Proteus in the fable: always ready to put on all sorts of shapes, according as occasion and necessity may require.’<sup>83</sup> Similarly, John Briggs advised a prospective member of the political line that persuasion depended upon ‘a systematic endeavour to please and conciliate, and to render the person whom you are desirous to convince pleased with himself’.<sup>84</sup>

These expectations applied even during the tenure of Marquess Wellesley, usually remembered as an era of overt aggression on the part of the Company. To be sure, Wellesley often expressed himself in violent terms. In a letter to John Malcolm (who reported that the Marathas had adopted an insolent tone in their dealings with him), Wellesley declared that he would not ‘suffer with impunity’ such a ‘spirit of wanton insult and barbarous provocation’.

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<sup>80</sup> Richard Jenkins to Mountstuart Elphinstone, 22 Jan. 1816, Letter books of Sir Richard Jenkins, Mss Eur E111, OIOC, p. 270.

<sup>81</sup> Wicquefort, *The ambassador and his functions*, p. 326. Also Martens, *Guide diplomatique*, p. 151.

<sup>82</sup> Martens, *Guide diplomatique*, p. 120.

<sup>83</sup> de Callières, *The art of diplomacy*, p. 88.

<sup>84</sup> Briggs, *Letters*, p. 179.

He warned that 'the Governor-General in Council will enforce the respect due to the great and powerful empire which is committed to his charge, even at the hazard of dissolving all connection with [that] state'.<sup>85</sup> In practice, however, Wellesley was inclined to be more yielding; or at least, that is the impression he wanted his diplomatic representatives to cultivate. Tellingly, Wellesley found fault with Captain Kirkpatrick for mentioning the desirability of war with Tipu in the presence of the Nizam of Hyderabad, and stating publicly that the Governor General intended to use compulsory measures against Sindhia.<sup>86</sup>

Conversely, when Josiah Webbe refrained from reproaching Sindhia too forcibly about the presence of Tipu's *vakil* at court and his preservation of Sirji Rao as first minister, Webbe met with Wellesley's approval. Wellesley concurred in Webbe's view that the Resident could do no good by insisting on these points, even agreeing that to do so would actually be dangerous, and might in fact 'precipitate questions of the greatest magnitude, and involve our affairs at this Court in circumstances which might embarrass the judgment to be formed by your Excellency'.<sup>87</sup> It was the prerogative of the executive branch of the Company, embodied in the Governor-General-in-Council, to take decisive action; if the Resident took too bold a line in his negotiations with the Indian ruler, he robbed the Governor-General of his room for manoeuvre and his ability to conclude a peace.

The attack on Richard Jenkins's camp while he was Acting Resident with Daulat Rao Sindhia makes Wellesley's stance amply evident. Although Sindhia and the Company were ostensibly allies, tensions erupted between the two because the Company sided with the Rana of Gohud in her territorial dispute with Sindhia over the lands of Gohud and Gwalior. In response to Sindhia's marked hostility, Jenkins left the camp, despite Sindhia's refusal to grant him a passport for safe passage through his dominions. After leaving the camp, Jenkins was approached by a conciliatory mission from Daulat Rao inducing him to return. Upon Jenkins's return, however, his camp was attacked and his property plundered by a large body of Sindhia's irregular troops. A number of people in Jenkins's entourage were severely wounded, including the Residency surgeon Dr. Wise, the head of his escort Lieutenant Greene, and several sepoys. Although general opinion was that Sindhia was not directly responsible for the attack, Sindhia also made no effort to find and punish the offenders, nor did he make reparations for Jenkins's loss of property. Jenkins was subsequently held a virtual prisoner in Sindhia's camp as Wellesley and Sindhia negotiated over the status of Gwalior and Gohud, which were later conceded to Sindhia by the Company.<sup>88</sup>

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<sup>85</sup> N.B. Edmonstone to John Malcolm, 8 Apr. 1804, in *Wellesley despatches*, vol. IV, p. 562.

<sup>86</sup> Marquess Wellesley to William Palmer, 19 Aug. 1798, in *Ibid.*, p. 220.

<sup>87</sup> *Ibid.*, 472.

<sup>88</sup> Marquess Wellesley to Daulat Rao Sindhia, 23 Feb. 1805, in *Wellesley despatches*, vol. IV, p. 297.

Not only did the Governor-General-in-Council fail to send military back-up to support Jenkins and to ensure his personal safety, Jenkins's initial departure from the camp met with reproof from the administration in Calcutta. According to a sternly worded letter to Richard Jenkins from the secretary to the Governor-General-in-Council, 'an extreme case alone could justify your abdication of your representative character without the positive orders of your Government'.<sup>89</sup> Major-General Arthur Wellesley, commanding Company forces in the vicinity, was also privately of the opinion that Jenkins had acted 'in too great a hurry'. He believed that Sindhia was open to restoring good relations with the Company, and considered it 'unlucky that Mr. Jenkins has brought affairs to such a crisis that it is absolutely necessary to interfere with a strong hand to save Mr. Jenkins and our Honour' (though all Wellesley actually had in mind, in this instance, was a strongly-worded letter from the Governor-General).<sup>90</sup> Similarly, though Marquess Wellesley subsequently reprimanded Sindhia in fierce language for the injury to the Resident and his escort, in the end he proved all too ready to forgive the Maratha chieftain. Although he viewed events at Sindhia's camp as an 'atrocious act of violating the sacred person of the British minister at your Highness's court', Wellesley nevertheless claimed to be 'disposed to limit the measures to be adopted by the British Government upon this occasion'.<sup>91</sup> Wellesley did not even enforce his demands for a full restoration of the Resident's property, or the due punishment of the thieves. In the end Sindhia was even granted the lands which had instigated the dispute in the first place. Jenkins was, moreover, strictly ordered to avoid 'severe remonstrations' when communicating Wellesley's request that Sindhia publicly repudiate the thieves in open *darbar*, and 'to avoid any harsh or irritating language which is always undignified and inconsistent with true Policy'.<sup>92</sup>

The Residents viewed the incident with Sindhia rather differently from the Governor-General-in-Council, reflecting their different ideas of their own role in the subcontinent. Whatever the opinions of Indian onlookers might have been, many Residents were convinced that events at Sindhia's camp had belittled the Residents in the eyes of the courtly elite. Elphinstone felt himself in a difficult position at Nagpur, and attributed it in part to 'many circumstances which occurred in Jenkins's case which go to shake the credit of English

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<sup>89</sup> N.B. Edmonstone to Richard Jenkins, 2 Apr. 1805, Official copies of letters from N.B. Edmonstone, Marquess Wellesley Papers, Add MS 13603, BL, p. 62.

<sup>90</sup> Arthur Wellesley to Colonel Barry Close, 4 Mar. 1805, Papers of Maj-Gen William Kirkpatrick, Mss Eur F228/79, OIOC, p. 1.

<sup>91</sup> Marquess Wellesley to Daulat Rao Sindhia, 23 Feb. 1805, in *Wellesley despatches*, vol. IV, p. 297.

<sup>92</sup> N.B. Edmonstone to Richard Jenkins, 2 Apr. 1805, Official copies of letters from N.B. Edmonstone, Marquess Wellesley Papers, Add MS 13603, BL, p. 66.

Agents at all the courts in India.<sup>93</sup> The Company's refusal to back Jenkins, and ultimately the concessions which they made in Gohud and Gwalior, were perceived to have undermined the position of the Residents in India. As Elphinstone impatiently awaited the result of the peace negotiations, he claimed that 'if he get Gohud & Gwalior it will be too horrid I shall be ashamed to look a native in the face if after what happened to Jenkins & what has since occurred we let Sindia obtain from our fears what he sought in vain from our justice.'<sup>94</sup> Two year after his run-in with Sindhia, Jenkins himself concluded that 'those barriers once removed, when they [Indian rulers] find they can insult, they will think it possible even to attack us with impunity.' He recorded how the Company's concessions to Sindhia, alongside the peace concluded with Holkar, were 'represented as the effects of fear' at the court of the Rajah of Berar (where Jenkins was then stationed).<sup>95</sup> For the Residents, it seems, the paramount thing was less to maintain good relations than it was to maintain relations founded on the Company's predominance. For example, although Henry Russell was reprimanded for the tone he took in his negotiations with the southern *jagirdars* at Poona, he nevertheless insisted that 'we must not let a snotty nosed Marhatta see we are afraid of him'.<sup>96</sup>

It was this kind of attitude which the Marquess of Hastings, though equally remembered for his expansionary tactics, complained of during his early years as Governor-General. He blamed the Residents' lack of respect and failure to propitiate Indian monarchs for the unstable political condition of the Company when he arrived on the scene in 1813. He accused the Residents of 'assum[ing] the functions of a dictator', rather than 'acting in the character of an ambassador'.<sup>97</sup> In his view, 'a rational jealousy of our power is not likely to excite half the intrigues against us which must naturally be produced by the wanton provocations which we have been giving on trivial subjects to all the States around us.'<sup>98</sup> Hastings worried that the high-handed behaviour of Company officials had agitated the Indian elite to such an extent that they would be ready to rally together against the Company whenever the occasion presented itself. The Resident of the Nawab Vizier had been 'authoritatively interfering with all the minor concerns of his domestic rule' to the point that the Vizier was 'driven [...] to a desperation which he proclaimed in open durbar'. In Nagpur,

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<sup>93</sup> Mountstuart Elphinstone to John Adam, 27 Aug. 1805, Letters from Mountstuart Elphinstone to John Adam, John Adam Papers, Mss Eur F109/89, OIOC, np.

<sup>94</sup> Mountstuart Elphinstone to John Adam, 25 Oct. 1805, Letters from Mountstuart Elphinstone to John Adam, John Adam Papers, Mss Eur F109/89, OIOC, np.

<sup>95</sup> Richard Jenkins to Lt. Charles Russell, 22 Feb. 1807, Letter books of Sir Richard Jenkins, Mss Eur E111, OIOC, np.

<sup>96</sup> Henry Russell to James Casamaijor, 17 Dec. 1810, Russell Papers, MS. Eng. lett. d. 162, Bodl. Oxf., p. 121.

<sup>97</sup> Bute, *The private journal of the Marquess Hastings*, p. 47.

<sup>98</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 44.

the Rajah of Berar, 'nominally our friend, has evinced repeatedly his hostile suspicion of us.' Meanwhile, in Hyderabad, the Nizam was open about his hatred of the British. Hastings worried that escalating tensions with Ranjit Singh might furnish these Indian rulers with an opportunity to attack while the Company's forces were otherwise engaged.<sup>99</sup> This view was shared by the former Resident at Nagpur H.T. Colebrooke, who similarly argued that the Company's objectives would be more readily attained were the Residents 'duly impressed with the importance attached by Government to a conciliatory conduct'.<sup>100</sup> Rather than obviating the need for war, the Residents were creating the conditions which would give rise to one.

The Residents' eagerness to assert their authority stemmed from the fact that they saw themselves less as diplomats bound by the usual rules of comportment, than as mavericks operating in lawless spaces. In particular, because Residents believed that they fundamentally could not rely on the protection of the allied states within which they were stationed, they resented any limitations to their access to, and deployment of, armed forces. During his tenure at Nagpur, for example, Mountstuart Elphinstone engaged in a long and increasingly petulant campaign to secure a military escort for his Residency. In March of 1805, as the Pindaris encroached ever deeper into the Rajah's territory, Elphinstone requested his friend in Calcutta John Adam to put a word in for him. In Elphinstone's words, '[y]ou can't think what a bore it was to be without any defence against them'.<sup>101</sup> Though initially the suggestion appeared to have met with approval in Calcutta, Elphinstone heard no further news of his intended escort for months. The impatience with which he awaited its arrival seems to be a testament to how much he felt the need of it. In Elphinstone's eyes, if war broke out with the Pindaris he could not depend on the Rajah for his defence; rather, to quote him, 'I shall consider myself as placed close to the enemy's camp & shall trust only to my own vigilance for my safety.'<sup>102</sup> Elphinstone therefore felt that the Company's failure to respond to his request betrayed a marked indifference to his personal interests, indeed his very safety. As he remarked resentfully to his friend Adam, 'I wonder there is no "Censor of small wares" about the Govt House to wipe off things that are of no importance but to individuals & of great to them.'<sup>103</sup>

Elphinstone's successor at Nagpur, Richard Jenkins, similarly felt very keenly his lack of military support at Nagpur. This shortfall was felt strongest, apparently, when Jenkins

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<sup>99</sup> Ibid., p. 46.

<sup>100</sup> Report appended to H.T. Colebrooke to Marquess of Hastings, 15 Oct. 1814, Cleveland Public Library Papers, IOR Neg 4226, wq091.92 Ea77p5, OIOC, p. 23-24.

<sup>101</sup> Mountstuart Elphinstone to John Adam, 3 Mar. 1805, Letters from Mountstuart Elphinstone to John Adam, John Adam Papers, Mss Eur F109/89, OIOC, np.

<sup>102</sup> Mountstuart Elphinstone to John Adam, 6 Apr. 1805, Ibid., np.

<sup>103</sup> Mountstuart Elphinstone to John Adam, 19 May 1805, Ibid., np.

was set the task of inquiring into the competing claims put forward by the Rajah of Nagpur and the Nizam of Hyderabad to territories in Bhopal. After fruitlessly interviewing people at court and trawling the Residency archives for information, Strachey reflected that if 'a British force [were] established in the Rajah's territories [in Nagpur] many difficulties which now impede such researches would be removed, and probably many superior sources of information now closed by fears of the Rajah's jealousy, would of their own accord become accessible.'<sup>104</sup> Without the threat of military force, the Resident felt himself unable to compete with the power represented by the Rajah at Nagpur.

This craving for military support manifested itself in disputes with military authorities in cases where forces were stationed at or near the Residency. These disputes were particularly prevalent at Hyderabad, where a large subsidiary force was posted. In 1808, the arguments between Thomas Sydenham and Lieutenant Colonel Montresor over their respective authority had reached such a pitch that Sydenham was forced to refer to the Governor-General-in-Council to establish a rule which would obviate such misunderstandings in future. Montresor objected to the fact that Sydenham had been corresponding with Colonel Doveton, who commanded a corps in Berar. Montresor viewed such a correspondence as a breach of his military authority, while Sydenham argued that the letters exchanged, and the instructions issued, were political in nature and therefore fell within the Resident's purview. It was Sydenham's view that, given his political experience and responsibilities, only he was situated to issue certain commands to the subsidiary force. In a private letter to Sydenham, Montresor voiced quite a different opinion, and complained with great feeling that 'from the length of time you have been acting in a political capacity you are not aware what must be the feelings of an Officer' when information about orders being issued to his subordinates was being systematically withheld from him. The Governor-General-in-Council ultimately acknowledged Sydenham's right to correspond with officers when the circumstances appeared urgently to demand it, but Sydenham was nevertheless urged to use the commanding officer as a channel whenever possible. The Governor-General-in-Council's decision does not seem to have clearly resolved the issue, however, as it did not make transparent what exactly constituted an urgent situation.<sup>105</sup> Indeed, Sydenham's successor Henry Russell had similar problems with the commanding officers of the Hyderabad subsidiary force, Colonel Conran and Colonel Montresor respectively.<sup>106</sup> Russell also found

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<sup>104</sup> Richard Jenkins to Mountstuart Elphinstone, 27 Oct. 1811, Letter books of Sir Richard Jenkins, Mss Eur E111, OIOC, np.

<sup>105</sup> Extract political letter from Bengal, 2 Feb. 1808, BC, IOR/F/4/247/5583, OIOC, p. 4.

<sup>106</sup> Henry Russell to Charles Russell, 26 Jun. 1810, MSS. Eng. lett. d. 151, Russell Papers, Bodl. Oxf., p. 131.

himself in trouble with the Government at Fort St George when he requisitioned troops from Madras and refused to authorize their return.<sup>107</sup>

While administrators in London and Calcutta expected Residents to adhere to diplomatic conventions of behaviour usually characterized as conciliatory or accommodating, Residents themselves thus had rather different ideas about how to most effectively represent Company interests. In practice, this meant that they were liable to take an aggressive tone when their superiors would have preferred them to be more moderate. This difference of opinion about the Residents' role at Indian courts is reflected in the Residents' avidity to secure control of military forces in the region. Technically these subsidiary forces were under the control of military officers, but Residents were increasingly prone to encroach on the prerogatives of their military counterparts; these interpositions on the part of the Resident were a recurring source of conflict during the period under study. Even more controversial than the Resident's involvement in military affairs, however, were their disciplinary measures. The following section will consider some of the heated controversies which erupted around the Resident's use of exemplary violence.

#### **4. Debating the pedagogical value of violence**

One of the most dramatic, albeit not widely publicized, controversies within the political line was when Henry Russell was dismissed from his post as Resident at Hyderabad. The Court of Directors were appalled when they learned that two Indians had died of their wounds after being brutally flogged by his order. The men had been caught robbing the market in front of the Residency, and Russell had ordered them flogged almost to death, that is, just short of what the doctor on hand predicted would kill them. The Court of Directors condemned Russell for failing to allow the two men the benefit of a trial, and for punishing them so ruthlessly. In the Court's view, 'such a proceeding must have impressed the people of Hyderabad with a strange idea of British justice'.<sup>108</sup> The consequences were perceived to be serious, since the East India Company relied on the introduction of rule of law as a powerful justification for imperial intervention. India was perceived, or at least was described as, a lawless place where tyrants ruled by whim. Some of the most triumphant language of the period celebrated the fact that Britons had moderated what they believed to be the brutality of Indian law, particularly punishment by mutilation.<sup>109</sup> Russell's actions were therefore in stark opposition to the public image which his superiors sought to cultivate in India, and indeed,

<sup>107</sup> Extract political letter from Bengal, 1 Jan. 1817, BC, IOR/F/4/592/14290, OIOC, p. 14.

<sup>108</sup> Court of Directors to Bengal Political Department, General Correspondence with India, IOR/E/4/700, OIOC, p. 241a.

<sup>109</sup> Fisch, *Cheap lives and dear limbs*, p. 130.

across the empire more generally, as illustrated by James Epstein's study of a similarly scandalous instance of corporal punishment in Trinidad around the same period.<sup>110</sup> In fact, Russell was considered to have acted contrary to the very principles which were supposed to define him as a Briton; for, as Colin Kidd has emphasized, in the eighteenth century 'Britishness' was seen to derive particularly from the enjoyment of rights and liberties, among which Britons numbered government by consent and trial by jury.<sup>111</sup> British justice was supposed to be the best and fairest in the world, so it was particularly galling to the Directors in London that a Briton should behave in such a cruel and arbitrary manner when in a position of public authority abroad.

The Company's official stance on corporal punishment can be understood in part by situating it against a backdrop of changing attitudes in Britain. In the early modern period, violent forms of discipline and punishment were central to the exercise of power. This power was diffuse throughout society, belonging, in varying degrees, to heads of households, local authority figures, and to the state. Violence, and the shaming rituals and public spectacle which often accompanied it, was regarded as a legitimate disciplinary tool so long as it was judged commensurate with the offense.<sup>112</sup> By the late eighteenth century, however, transportation and imprisonment were increasingly preferred to whipping, branding, and hanging. When physical punishments were administered, there was a greater likelihood that they would be carried out in the privacy of the prison or immediately outside its walls.<sup>113</sup> Growing numbers of commentators denounced the brutalizing and dehumanizing effect which public displays of judicial violence might have on the population, and questioned whether the crowds were extracting the intended meanings from these performances.<sup>114</sup> These changing attitudes to corporal punishments were informed by changing ideas about the body and its significance.<sup>115</sup> As Lynn Hunt has argued, a more recognizable notion of human rights was emerging as greater value was placed upon bodily integrity, and as a culture of sensibility urged an ever greater sense of identification with one's fellow human beings and their experiences both physical and spiritual.<sup>116</sup> At the same time, other forms of discipline and

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<sup>110</sup> James Epstein, *Scandal of colonial rule: Power and subversion in the British Atlantic during the Age of Revolution* (Cambridge, 2012), p. 17;20.

<sup>111</sup> Colin Kidd, *British identities before nationalism: Ethnicity and nationhood in the Atlantic world, 1600-1800* (Cambridge, 2006), p. 79-80. See also Peter Mandler, *The English national character: The history of an idea from Edmund Burke to Tony Blair* (London, 2006), p. 37-8.

<sup>112</sup> Susan Dwyer Amussen, 'Punishment, discipline, and power: The social meanings of violence in early modern England', *JBS*, 34:1 (1995): 1-34.

<sup>113</sup> J.A. Sharpe, *Judicial punishment in England* (London, 1990), p. 47.

<sup>114</sup> V.A.C. Gatrell, *The hanging tree: Execution and the English people 1770-1868* (Oxford, 1994), p. 328.

<sup>115</sup> Randall McGowen, 'The body and punishment in eighteenth-century England', *The Journal of Modern History*, 59:4 (1987): 652-79.

<sup>116</sup> Lynn Hunt, *Inventing human rights: A history* (New York, NY, 2007), p. 82.



punishment, not least the modern penitentiary, promised alternative means of social control.<sup>117</sup> This is not to suggest, though, that the change was instant or total, and public executions continued to have their vocal supporters well into the nineteenth century, when they were finally abolished in Britain in 1868.<sup>118</sup>

Opinions in Britain regarding corporal punishment were divided, and these divisions were equally apparent among British officials in India. To revert to the previous example, whereas the Court of Directors in London were unanimous in their condemnation of Russell's actions, the Governor-General-in-Council in Calcutta seem to have been in serious disagreement about the justice and 'humanity' of Russell's decision to flog the thieves in the Residency bazaar.<sup>119</sup> Arguments concerning the public benefits of corporal punishment were given new life in a context where the populace was believed to respond particularly well to vigorous rule as well as visual display (a theme which will be picked up in the following chapter on political pageantry). This argument was commonly used by Residents, who defended aggressive measures by suggesting that public displays of force were uniquely appropriate in an Indian context. Indians, they declared, responded best to coercive tactics. Indeed, some Residents argued that clemency and conciliation, which in Britain might be considered virtues, were entirely lost on the Indian populace, 'whose barbarous pride makes them bad judges of dignified moderation', to quote one Resident.<sup>120</sup> In fact, in India, it was sometimes argued, the usual rules for civilized behaviour did not apply at all. Russell, for instance, defended the brutal flogging meted out to the thieves based on the lawless and violent nature of Hyderabad itself. As he put it, 'illegality is a breach of law. Where there is no law there can be no illegality.'<sup>121</sup> This statement reflected a contemporary belief that the law of nations, some might even say the laws of nature, did not operate in the non-European world in the same way that they did in Europe.<sup>122</sup> Thus, while there was certainly a strand of thought that emphasized Britain's responsibility to mitigate what Britons considered to be the vicious extremes of Hindu and Muslim law, particularly the punishment of mutilation, there

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<sup>117</sup> Michael Ignatieff, *A just measure of pain: The penitentiary in the industrial revolution, 1750-1850* (London, 1978), p. 210.

<sup>118</sup> Gatrell, *The hanging tree*, p. 591.

<sup>119</sup> A member of council decided to issue his own minute expressing his censure of Russell. Minute of Mr. Dowdeswell, 12 Sept. 1818, BC, IOR/F/4/588/14274, OIOC, p. 38-43.

<sup>120</sup> Mountstuart Elphinstone to John Adam, 6 May 1805, John Adam Papers, Mss Eur F109/89, OIOC, np. Henry Russell agreed that 'they mistake for weakness what we practice as forbearance', Henry Russell to Marquess of Hastings, 'The condition and resources of the Nizam's government', Russell Papers, MS. Eng. misc. c. 324, Bodl. Oxf., p. 6.

<sup>121</sup> General correspondence of Sir Henry, 1806-31, Russell Papers, MSS. Eng. lett. c. 172, Bodl. Oxf., p. 141.

<sup>122</sup> Eliga Gould, 'Zones of law, zones of violence: The legal geography of the British Atlantic, circa 1772', *The William & Mary Quarterly*, 60:3 (2003): 474.

were equally British officials who believed that such acts of state violence were entirely appropriate and indeed necessary in an Indian context.

The underlying logic of many of these acts of physical brutality was that judicial violence should be used primarily to deter resistance rather than simply to punish the guilty. Residents saw the spectre of opposition everywhere, and the breadth of the perceived threat led them to believe in the necessity of exemplary acts of violence. Henry Russell speedily tried and executed several officers in the Hyderabad subsidiary force who had mutinied in 1812, because ‘the Populace of Hyderabad are made of very combustible Materials, and a little Spark is at any time sufficient to occasion an Explosion’, elaborating that ‘if the Mutiny had not been put down with a strong Hand, some very unpleasant Consequences would have ensued from it’.<sup>123</sup> Similarly, when the dethroned Rajah of Nagpur attempted to lead a revolt against the Company, the Resident Richard Jenkins was quick to identify and publicly hang his supporters; in his view,

there will be no want of turbulent and disaffected people to second any sinister views of our enemies and those of the new Government, if they are not overawed by the presence of a sufficient body of our troops and the vigor of the measures adopted by the Government to repress and punish all treasonable attempts.<sup>124</sup>

Because resistance and ill feeling was perceived to permeate more or less everywhere, the guilt of any one individual was less important than the effects that a visibly brutal punishment of that individual would have on the broader population.

In the Residents’ eyes, this meant that the best punishments would be those which were locally specific, intelligible, and suited to Indian audiences. When Mountstuart Elphinstone was asked to report on the desirability of introducing British criminal justice into the Peshwa’s former dominions, he argued against it since ‘the whole of this [British] system is evidently better calculated for protecting innocent from punishment and the guilty from undue severity, than for securing the community by deterring from crimes’, whereas Indian forms of punishment, ‘although they were inhuman (or rather because they were inhuman) were effectual in striking terror’.<sup>125</sup> Blowing perpetrators from a cannon, for instance, was held to be an ideal form of punishment both because it drew from Indian precedents, inspired terror in those who witnessed it, and perhaps unexpectedly, could be argued on humanitarian grounds to constitute a quicker and more pain-free death than other forms of execution such as decapitation.<sup>126</sup> Accordingly, when three men were arrested and executed for treason at

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<sup>123</sup> Henry Russell to James Casaimaijor, 1 Dec. 1812, Russell Papers, MS. Eng. lett. d. 163, Bodl. Oxf., p. 184.

<sup>124</sup> Richard Jenkins to John Adam, 29 Jul. 1818, BC, IOR/F/4/619/15425, OIOC, p. 27-28.

<sup>125</sup> Report on the Deckan, Elphinstone Collection, Mss Eur F88/219, OIOC, p. 98-99.

<sup>126</sup> Ibid., p. 199.

Poona for their association with the rebel Chitoor Singh, Mountstuart Elphinstone chose to blow them from a cannon, which was later justified on the grounds that the threat of rebellion following the Company's conquest 'could only be repressed by severe examples'.<sup>127</sup> The crucial point, then, was the spectacle. Kim Wagner has traced this mentality to the uprising of 1857, and has identified it at work following outbreaks of resistance in India in the late nineteenth century; yet, as the example of the Residents shows, this logic is evident in much earlier sources.<sup>128</sup>

It is worth noting that the execution of rebels was for the most part approved of by the Governor-General-in-Council in Calcutta. The fear of a general uprising in India was so acute that everyone seems to have agreed on the necessity of harsh punitive measures to repress incipient revolt. The point at which consensus splintered was on the question of whether acts of summary justice should be employed in other scenarios where the threat of general rebellion was less apparent or indeed non-existent; in other words, whether judicial violence should become an accepted part of the Resident's repertoire. Thus, Henry Russell viewed the brutal flogging of the thieves and murderers who encroached on his domains as a mandatory display of his power and authority, while his superiors questioned the necessity and indeed the ethics of such a measure given that it was elicited by what appeared to be an isolated and ordinary criminal act which should have been handled by the Nizam and his officers.<sup>129</sup>

The example of the Resident at Travancore Colin Macaulay is a further case in point. Following an unsuccessful revolt orchestrated by the *diwan*, Macaulay sent the executed minister's body to the capital city of Trivandrum where his body was strung up on a gibbet for public viewing.<sup>130</sup> The Governor-General-in-Council responded to news of this public exposure with horror. While such a revolt was taken very seriously, hanging up the minister's body was considered to be 'adverse to the common feelings of humanity and to the principles of a Civilised Government.' The Governor-General-in-Council firmly refused to admit the necessity of such a measure, and regretted immensely that a British official had been openly involved in it. Indeed, to them it seemed apparent that such measures were savage and uncivilized, and Macaulay's apparent acquiescence with this gross act raised questions about the ability of the Resident to properly represent the Company in Travancore. Residents, as government representatives, were supposed to embody all the virtues which Britain

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<sup>127</sup> Papers of Mountstuart Elphinstone relating to the rupture in India in 1817, Elphinstone Collection, Mss Eur F88/57, OIOC, p. 8.

<sup>128</sup> Kim A. Wagner, "'Calculated to strike terror': The Amritsar massacre and the spectacle of colonial violence", *P&P*, 233:1 (2016): 189.

<sup>129</sup> Minute of Mr Dowdeswell, 12 Sept. 1818, BC, IOR/F/4/588/14274, OIOC, p. 42; Court of Directors to Governor-General-in-Council, 12 Jul. 1820, BC, IOR/F/4/626/16088, OIOC, p. 5-6.

<sup>130</sup> Colin Macaulay to Government at Fort St George, 14 Apr. 1809, BC, IOR/F/4/338/7687, OIOC, p. 8.

supposedly stood for. They were meant to exhibit self-control, reason, judgement and understanding, not the kind of vindictiveness which appeared to be the driving force behind Macaulay's treatment of the minister's corpse. Macaulay, on the other hand, regarded the degrading treatment of the minister's corpse as nothing short of a practical necessity. In his words:

It cannot but be of importance, that in India more than any where, men should be taught that he, [...] who utterly disregards and boldly discards from his breast, every sentiment of humanity, [...] that such a man cannot be too ignominiously punished and exposed.<sup>131</sup>

The actions of Colin Macaulay, and the reaction of the Governor-General-in-Council, expose the contradiction underlying Company policy in India. Macaulay defended his actions by arguing that the 'inhumanity' of the minister could not be too harshly punished, but in so doing Macaulay exposed himself to accusations of inhumanity from concerned administrators in Calcutta and London. This is a potent illustration of a process which Michael Taussig dubbed 'colonial mimesis', 'a colonial mirroring of otherness that reflects back onto the colonists the barbarity of their own social relations, but as imputed to the savagery they yearn to colonize.'<sup>132</sup> In their efforts to control what they perceived to be native savagery, imperial officials were liable to resort to precisely the kinds of violent acts for which native rulers were condemned. Such displays of cruelty on the part of some of the Residents inspired unease within the central government. The Company's claim to a civilizing mission was predicated on the moral and intellectual qualities of its agents, and their essential difference from the Indians they were meant to regulate and improve through example.<sup>133</sup> The behaviour of Residents like Henry Russell and Colin Macaulay, though it resonated with contemporary devaluations of Indians and Indian political culture, nevertheless powerfully undermined the Company's claims to be a civilizing influence in India.

These incidents of brute display within the political line were not an everyday occurrence, but although the acts themselves might have been unusual, the logic underlying them was not. From the perspective of many of the Residents, such displays of force were the best, perhaps even the only way of visibly expressing their power. In their view, the European in India had to learn to suppress his natural aversion to violence if he was to effectively maintain social and political stability. Mountstuart Elphinstone ventured that 'it is possible

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<sup>131</sup> Ibid., 19.

<sup>132</sup> Michael Taussig, *Shamanism, colonialism, and the wild man: A study in terror and healing* (Chicago, IL, 1986), p. 134.

<sup>133</sup> Carey A. Watt, 'The relevance and complexity of civilizing missions c. 1800-2010', in *Civilizing missions in colonial and postcolonial South Asia: From improvement to development*, eds. Carey A. Watt and Michael Mann (Cambridge, 2012), p. 1.

that a very civilized Government may not be suitable to a society in a less advanced stage and that coarse expedients at which our minds revolt may be the only ones likely to check those evils which originate in the barbarism of the people'.<sup>134</sup> While imperial rhetoric posited the 'civilization' of Britain as its distinguishing feature and the foundation on which its empire rested, certain of its officials, to the contrary, viewed 'civilization' as a hindrance to be cast aside.

## Conclusion

British attitudes to the use of violence in India seem to have changed significantly with the passage of time. In the late nineteenth century, as historians like Mark Condos and Elizabeth Kolsky have shown, the introduction of legal mechanisms like the Murderous Outrages Act gave colonial officials 'licence to kill' in frontier areas deemed dangerous or unstable.<sup>135</sup> While these acts were not entirely uncontroversial, they did reflect general acceptance of the idea that officials stationed along the borders of British India should be given free rein to defend themselves and assert their authority by whatever means necessary in what was perceived to be a zone of perpetual warfare. The assumptions enshrined in these laws were in many ways the same as those articulated by the Residents examined in this chapter, who certainly saw themselves as men under siege. In the early nineteenth century, however, there was no such consensus within the Company and the British public more broadly about the Residents' executive powers. Though Residents drew on widespread ideas of Indian warfare, political culture, and the law of nations to argue for the necessity of coercive measures, their superiors remained unconvinced of the appropriateness of diplomatic agents resorting to violent methods.

While administrators in London and Calcutta emphasized the Residents' responsibility to conciliate, the Residents' rather different interpretation of their role at Indian royal courts led them to try to assume military powers and occasionally even to engage in acts which contemporaries deemed savage. The Governor-General-in-Council sought to maintain a strict division between the military and diplomatic branches of the Company, but in an imperial context situations of war and routine questions of law and order could blur together.<sup>136</sup> Given that the Company's wars against Indian states were regularly justified on

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<sup>134</sup> Report on the Deccan, Elphinstone Collection, Mss Eur F88/219, OIOC, p. 196.

<sup>135</sup> Mark Condos, 'Licence to kill: The Murderous Outrages Act and the rule of law in colonial India, 1867-1925', *MAS*, 50:2 (2016): 479-517; Elizabeth Kolsky, 'The colonial rule of law and the legal regime of exception: Frontier 'fanaticism' and state violence in British India', *The American Historical Review*, 120:4 (2015): 1218-1246.

<sup>136</sup> For this point, see Anupama Rao and Steven Pierce, 'Discipline and the other body: Humanitarianism, violence, and the colonial exception', in *Discipline and the other body: Correction, corporeality, colonialism* (Durham, NC, 2006), p. 2.

the grounds of the violent and untrustworthy nature of the Indian population, it was perhaps inevitable that such thinking would inform the activities of the Company's civilian officials. Debates about the appropriate uses of violence thus reflected the rocky transition between diplomacy and the nascent stages of imperial influence.

The reactions of the Governor-General-in-Council to the Residents' acts of violence and, even more so, the reactions of the Court of Directors in London, also speak to contemporary concerns about the adoption of purportedly 'Indian' styles of rule. As Britons perceived it, Indian political legitimacy was rooted in the ability to protect one's clients and punish infractions with dramatic shows of force, and it was certainly considered desirable for the Residents to possess this aura of authority. At the same time, this principle not only directly contravened the conventions governing traditional diplomatic activity, it also brought into question the Company's claim to be curbing the brutality of Indian rulers. Thus, controversies over the use of violence were galvanized by the question of how far the Company officials should assimilate to Indian political culture.

The same basic problem animated the controversy over Residency expenditures. Though we might not usually connect debates over the appropriate use of violence with seemingly petty disputes over money, there is a common thread running through these discussions. The core issue which contemporaries were grappling with was the question of what constituted legitimacy in an imperial setting. To establish themselves at Indian courts British officials had to engage with Indian culture, but in what ways, and to what extent? The following chapter will show how these questions manifested themselves in recurring disagreements over Residency budgets, particularly concerning money spent on gift-exchange and items of display.

### Chapter 3. Gift-giving, grandeur, and the ideological underpinnings of Residency budgets

Scattered across the Indian landscape, a few telling traces of the Residents remain. In Lucknow, the imposing ruins of the British Residency are a popular tourist destination because of its association with the uprising of 1857, when the British inhabitants of the city sheltered within the fortifications for close to three months. In Hyderabad, the splendid Palladian villa commissioned by James Achilles Kirkpatrick has been converted into a women's college, and, though dilapidated, continues to draw visitors who marvel at the double staircase and the grand ballroom. Further south, in Kollam (formerly Quilon, the headquarters of the British Resident in Travancore), a large building with Italian architectural influences, now a government guest house, represents the legacy of Resident John Munro in the area. Though in varying states of disrepair, these buildings nevertheless convey one unmistakable message: someone important lived here. With their lofty domes, marble columns, and clean, classical lines, these crumbling mansions are the last vestiges of the Residents' carefully constructed aura of pomp and circumstance. They are a visible reminder of the magnificence which both reflected and reinforced the authority of the political representatives of the East India Company in the far corners of the subcontinent.

In their heyday, these buildings were awe-inspiring, but they were also controversial. While contemporaries were broadly agreed that the Residents should be housed and arrayed in suitably grand fashion, the expenses associated with the construction and maintenance of these houses, along with the costs of equipage, retinue, and other visible markers of the Resident's prestige, did not go uncontested. Throughout this period money was a major point of dispute dividing the Residents, the Governor-General-in-Council in Calcutta, and the Court of Directors in London. The problem was the Resident's expense claims. In addition to a small monthly salary, the Resident was also permitted to claim certain expenses on a monthly basis as a concession to the public duties incumbent on him as a government representative. Legitimate costs included office establishment, table attendance and camp equipage, *daks* (postal service), intelligence, charity, and articles purchased for presents. According to a Company policy of 1805, these expense claims could not exceed Rupees 5193..9..7 per month, a sum which was meant to constitute a hard maximum rather than a fixed monthly allowance.<sup>1</sup> Once submitted, expense claims were closely scrutinized by the Civil Auditor, who evaluated whether or not the costs laid out by the Resident were public and essential and therefore fit to be covered by the Company, or whether the charges represented private or

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<sup>1</sup> Memorandum of rules observed in the adjustment and audit of the accounts of Residencies at foreign courts under the Bengal government, BC, IOR/F/4/527/12633, OIOC, p. 22-29.

non-essential expenses to be defrayed by the Resident. The Civil Auditor and the Resident frequently disagreed on the status of various expenses, thus requiring the intervention of the Governor-General or occasionally the Court of Directors in London to decide the issue. Usually, these disagreements concerned money spent on gift-giving and items of display.

Previously these debates have been explained with reference to the pragmatic interests of the principal players; put crudely, the Company's hunger for profits was antithetical to the self-interest of the Residents, who endeavoured, for their part, to claim as much money as they could for themselves.<sup>2</sup> While there is some truth to this interpretation, this chapter argues that the problems besetting the establishment of Residency budgets are significantly more suggestive of the ideological and practical uncertainties endemic to Company policy in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth century than existing accounts would have it. Rather than seeing budgetary concerns as a straightforward, politically neutral problem to be resolved through the application of reason and experience, my contention is that in fact the problem of what to spend money on, and how much to spend, is also the problem of what we value, and how much we value it. In other words, a disagreement about what kinds of expenses are appropriate or necessary is often symptomatic of deeper points of difference. In this instance, debates about the Resident's expense claims were, at their core, expressions of uneasiness or uncertainty about the Resident's immersion in Indian court society and the forms of influence which they exercised there.

This ambivalence has been elided in existing studies of British engagement with gift-giving and material culture in Indian politics. Both Nicholas Dirks and Bernard Cohn have influentially examined how royal practices of benevolence and spectacle were appropriated and reconfigured by British imperial officials, but, by focusing on the late nineteenth century, they omit a long prehistory of inconsistency and equivocation. Dirks and Cohn also construct stark oppositions between British and Indian political culture which, for the early nineteenth-century at least, are far too clear-cut.<sup>3</sup> Both historians assume, to varying degrees, that the Residents and their superiors were blind to the social and political significance of courtly munificence and spectacle, but it is my contention that, although contemporaries might have disapproved of the methods employed by the Residents, it was not because they failed to understand the symbolic dimensions of these activities. Though not wishing to rob eighteenth-century Indian courtly culture of its local specificity, there are nevertheless ways in which the material side of Indian political culture closely resembled British valuations of gift exchange and stately grandeur. In fact, this chapter argues that the Resident's auditors objected to the

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<sup>2</sup> Fisher, *Indirect rule in India*, p. 101.

<sup>3</sup> Dirks, *The hollow crown*, p. 354; Cohn, 'Representing authority in Victorian India', p. 169.



giving of gifts and the purchase of items of display precisely because they were all too aware of the social and cultural resonances of things.

In the following chapter, money is considered from two theoretically distinct, albeit in practice closely and perhaps even inextricably related, perspectives: firstly, its economic aspect, as a store of 'real' value, and, secondly, its social and symbolic aspect, its imbrication (along with other forms of wealth) in webs of exchange which create ties, sometimes unequal, often power-laden, between people. Such an approach offers a helpful corrective to theories of market individualism, creating the space to acknowledge the complex motivations and practices involved in relationships of economic exchange. Thus, we can better recover the multiple and occasionally competing meanings which contemporaries, both Indian and British, attributed to money and other forms of wealth and the exchange thereof. This chapter centres on two particular foci of conflict, first gift-giving and then the purchase of items of display, to bring to light the ambiguities which complicated the adjudication of the Residents' expense claims. Through these debates, we are alerted once again to contemporary anxieties about the relationship between Briton and Indian, the borders between public and private, and the appropriate forms of imperial authority.

### **1. The symbolism and mechanics of gift exchange**

Historians of South Asia regularly note the importance of beneficence to early modern understandings of kingship and the instrumental role of gift exchange in binding together the multiple political communities which made up the various Hindu and Muslim polities of eighteenth- and nineteenth-century India.<sup>4</sup> At the most basic level, the provision of gifts and patronage imbued the sovereign with an aura of generosity, a quality emphasized and encouraged in both Hindu and Muslim religious culture. Through gifts of land, titles, and cloth, the Indian sovereign positioned himself as the ultimate wellspring of good fortune relative to his subjects.<sup>5</sup> Gifts have also been identified on a more symbolic level as an incorporative mechanism, a means of establishing an almost organic relationship between people. This understanding of the gift is conventionally attributed to the non-duality of the eighteenth-century Indian worldview; in symbolic terms, no firm boundary was drawn between the material and the spiritual.<sup>6</sup> Accordingly, material things possessed a meaning and a story of their own, deriving largely from their associations with people. Cloth, in particular, absorbed something of its owner's essence; thus, through gifts of cloth, a symbolic

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<sup>4</sup> Rudolph and Hoeber Rudolph, 'The subcontinental empire and the regional kingdom in Indian state formation', p. 51; Richards, 'The formulation of imperial authority under Akbar and Jahangir', p. 315.

<sup>5</sup> John R. McLane, *Land and local kingship in eighteenth-century Bengal* (Cambridge, 1993), p. 96-98.

<sup>6</sup> Brittlebank, *Tipu Sultan's search for legitimacy*, p. 102.

relationship was forged between giver and receiver.<sup>7</sup> This is why gifts of cloth formed a routine part of Mughal court ritual. Visitors, subjects, and supplicants offered *nazr* (gold coins, the presentation of which symbolised a recognition of the ruler as the source of all wealth) and accepted *khilat* (ceremonial clothes which symbolically incorporated the recipient into the body of the monarch).<sup>8</sup> Gifts of food performed a similar function, and Indian rulers routinely sat down to dinner with their ministers, distributing meals which were carefully differentiated to signal the respective status of the men who would consume them.<sup>9</sup> While cloth and food occupied a special place as particularly symbolic gifts, gift exchanges of all kinds could be understood, to some extent at least, as having these kinds of social and symbolic connotations. Gifts thus represented an efficacious means of creating and renewing relationships, whether with subjects, feudatories, or regional allies.

Indian rulers and their ministers readily incorporated Europeans into this gift economy. The Governor-General, given his position of recognized power, presented an attractive target whom Indian rulers enthusiastically sought to draw into relationships of exchange. Gifts were usually given with the intent of conciliating the Governor-General or placing an obligation on him to reciprocate with money or services. For instance, in 1808, when the Rajah of Nagpur stood in dire need of the Company's military and financial support against the encroachments of the Pindaris, he lavished the recently-arrived Governor-General Lord Minto with rich presents of brocade, jewels, and an elephant. The gifts were a way for the Rajah to test the new Governor-General's feelings towards him; the Governor-General's manner of receiving the presents would signal his intentions towards the Rajah. As the Rajah himself put it, 'your Lordship's acceptance of these presents will augment the ties of mutual regard and esteem, and will afford me a proof that the relation of amity and cordial union are progressively improving.'<sup>10</sup> Similarly, in 1816 when the Nawab Vizier of Awadh Ghazi-ud-din Haidar sought a favourable settlement of his stepmother's will, he routinely dispatched gifts of pickle and fruit from his garden to the Governor General in Calcutta, and, occasionally, the other members of his council. That same year, having heard rumours of a subscription for the families of British soldiers who fell at Waterloo, the Vizier determined to contribute to the fund, and transmitted 10,000 Rupees to the Resident with explicit instructions that the money be remitted to 'my respected uncle His Excellency the Right

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<sup>7</sup> C.A. Bayly, 'The origins of swadeshi (home industry): Cloth and Indian society, 1700-1930', in *The social life of things: Commodities in cultural perspective*, ed. Arjun Appadurai (Cambridge, 1986), p. 287.

<sup>8</sup> Cohn, 'Representing authority in Victorian India', p. 168-169.

<sup>9</sup> Brittlebank, *Tipu Sultan's search for legitimacy*, p. 99.

<sup>10</sup> Rajah of Nagpur to Earl of Minto, 2 Feb. 1808, In-letters 1808 Jan-June, Persian Correspondence, Minto Papers, MS 11574, NLS, p. 62.

Honorable the Governor General the Earl of Moira, that it might be distributed to them in my name'.<sup>11</sup> In this case, the Vizier's gift also functioned as a marker of prestige; being in the position to give charitably to the British tangibly expressed the Vizier's power and prosperity. By channeling such a gift through the Governor-General, the Vizier ensured that this act of generosity would not go unnoticed.

It was the Residents, however, who engaged in gift exchange on a more routine basis at Indian courts. The Resident exchanged *nazr* for *khilat* and accepted symbolic gifts of food, but also gave less ritualised presents. New Residents usually presented gifts to the ruler upon arrival; Mountstuart Elphinstone arrived in Nagpur loaded down with offerings for the Rajah Raghoji Bhonsla, his family, and his ministers, including 'two of the largest and most ornamented mirrors', a number of pistols and fowling pieces, 'a most elegant & various assortment of cutlery', 'two or three richly embroidered saddles & trappings, for horses', and 'a few illuminated & elegantly bound Hindoo books'.<sup>12</sup> Holidays and special occasions such as weddings, births, and circumcisions all prompted further gifts from the Resident.<sup>13</sup> Gifts were also sometimes given on a more spontaneous and informal basis, tailored to the tastes and habits of the ruler in question.<sup>14</sup> On 21 February 1799, for example, James Achilles Kirkpatrick noted in a postscript to a letter to his brother William that 'the Minister is passionately fond of game cocks; and very desirous of getting some English ones of the true game breed. Are any of this kind to be had at Madras?'<sup>15</sup> Later that same year, Kirkpatrick requested a pair of pigeons for Nizam Ali Khan, who was a connoisseur: 'Spice Island Pigeons I am told are as large as a goose, which would be thought a prodigious [variety] here'.<sup>16</sup>

Though gifts given might vary subtly according to the tastes of the recipient, there was an overwhelming continuity in the kinds of gifts exchanged between Indian rulers and British officials in official and ceremonial contexts. Gifts of cloth, jewels, elephants, and horses were traditional Indian political presents, with recognized meanings, which therefore

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<sup>11</sup> Richard Strachey to John Adam, 25 Jan. 1816, Richard Strachey Papers, Mss Eur D514/3, OIOC, p. 53.

<sup>12</sup> Mountstuart Elphinstone to John Adam, 18 Apr. 1804, Papers of John Adam, Mss Eur F109/88, OIOC, n.p.

<sup>13</sup> Richard Strachey to J.W. Sherer, Civil Auditor, 16 Oct. 1811, Richard Strachey Papers, Mss Eur D514/1, OIOC, p. 51; Richard Strachey to J.H. Sherer, Civil Auditor, 26 Aug. 1812, Richard Strachey Papers, Mss Eur D514/1, OIOC, p. 171.

<sup>14</sup> In addition to the example noted below, see records of Elphinstone's embassy in *Poona records*, vol. XII, p. 274. See also Mountstuart Elphinstone to John Adam, Papers of John Adam, Mss Eur F109, OIOC, particularly letters dated 4 Mar. 1804.

<sup>15</sup> J.A. Kirkpatrick to William Kirkpatrick, 21 Feb. 1799, Private letters from his brother James Achilles Kirkpatrick, Papers of Maj-Gen William Kirkpatrick, Mss Eur F228/11, OIOC, p. 80.

<sup>16</sup> J.A. Kirkpatrick to William Kirkpatrick, 29 Jun. 1801, Private letters from his brother James Achilles Kirkpatrick, Papers of Maj-Gen William Kirkpatrick, Mss Eur F228/13, OIOC, p. 83.

constituted a key element of these exchanges. As previously mentioned, cloth was perceived to retain something of the essence of the giver; jewels, meanwhile, were considered to possess talismanic qualities.<sup>17</sup> Elephants and horses, while practically useful for travel and warfare, were also symbolically associated with kingship and authority, and were usually presented heavily laden with jewelled saddles and trappings.<sup>18</sup> These conventional presents were supplemented with European specialties; according to Archibald Seton, it was ‘to foreign articles, from their superior beauty, their greater scarcity, and their consequent difficulty of procurement, that the natives attach the highest value.’<sup>19</sup> Standard items included dishware, guns, telescopes, and, most popular of all, timepieces. As in other parts of the Islamic world, watchmaking in India was largely a European affair, and watches and clocks were therefore always well-received.<sup>20</sup>

Christian Windler, commenting on the role of political gift-giving in nineteenth-century Franco-Tunisian diplomacy, concluded that the giving of timepieces was ‘only the most persistent instance of a cultural ascendancy communicated by the carefully designed composition of presents’.<sup>21</sup> In an Indian context, however, there is little to suggest that Residents chose presents intended to symbolise British technological advancement. The objective, at least according to surviving sources, was not to impress upon Indian rulers the superiority of European civilization, but instead to conciliate the ruler in question by catering to Indian tastes as the Residents understood them. Thomas Sydenham explicitly sought out ‘such rare and curious Machines and Trinkets as I thought suited to the Nizams Fancy’, including telescopes, air pumps, thermometers, hand organs, opera glasses, spectacles, and an electrical machine.<sup>22</sup> Mountstuart Elphinstone similarly tracked down timepieces at the desire of the Rajah of Berar, noting that ‘the Rajah is very curious in watches & is well provided in every thing but repeaters’ (a clock that audibly chimes the hour, usually by pulling a cord).<sup>23</sup> Rather than interpreting these gifts as a statement of European pre-eminence, Indian rulers seem to have viewed the acquisition of European items as a manifestation of the global reach

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<sup>17</sup> Brittlebank, *Tipu Sultan's search for legitimacy*, p. 137.

<sup>18</sup> Sujit Sivasundaram, ‘Trading knowledge: The East India Company's elephants in India and Britain’, *HJ*, 48:1 (2005): 27-63; Jagjeet Lally, ‘Empires and equines: The horse in art and exchange in South Asia, ca. 1600- ca. 1850’, *CSSAAME*, 25:1 (2015): 96-116.

<sup>19</sup> Archibald Seton to Marquess of Hastings, 6 Jun. 1814, Cleveland Public Library Papers, Neg 4227, wq091.92 Ea77p9, OIOC, p. 111.

<sup>20</sup> When the Peshwa of Poona's palace was seized following the final Maratha War, soldiers discovered ‘many very fine gold watches’ along with globes, an orrery, and a sundial. Private journal of an officer in the Deccan during AD 1817-1818, Grant-Duff Papers, Mss Eur F311/6, OIOC, p. 8.

<sup>21</sup> Christian Windler, ‘Tributes and presents in Franco-Tunisian diplomacy’, *Journal of Early Modern History*, 4:2 (2000): 186.

<sup>22</sup> Thomas Sydenham to Earl of Minto, 26 Aug. 1808, BC, IOR/F/4/296/6833, OIOC, p. 31.

<sup>23</sup> Mountstuart Elphinstone to John Adam, 4 Mar. 1804, Papers of John Adam, Mss Eur F109/88, OIOC, n.p.

of their own power and influence.<sup>24</sup> Indian rulers were therefore enthusiastic collectors of European goods, and as a result British visitors to Indian courts were often surprised and somewhat unsettled to encounter material reminders of home in very unexpected settings. George, Viscount Valentia, described his bewilderment on attending an entertainment hosted by the Nawab Vizier Asaf-ud-Daula, who was a particularly ardent collector:

The scene was so singular, and so contrary to all my ideas of Asiatic manners, that I could hardly persuade myself that the whole was not a masquerade. An English apartment, a band in English regimentals, playing English tunes; a room lighted by magnificent English girandoles, English tables, chairs, and looking glasses; an English service of plate; English knives, forks, spoons, wine glasses, decanters and cut glass vases - how could these convey any idea that we were seated in the court of an Asiatic Prince?<sup>25</sup>

Thus, while war and ceremonial were considered crucial to the construction of an 'empire of opinion', political gifts seem to have been used primarily to accrue social, rather than symbolic, capital; their main purpose was to amuse and entertain.

Nor was British gift-giving in the Indian context regulated by the logic of the potlatch, wherein rivals sought to outdo each other by competing to give the most valuable presents. Rather, the Company money which Residents spent on gifts was closely regulated. While sanctioning the exchange of presents in cases where the precedent of gift exchange had been inarguably set, the Governor-General-in-Council nevertheless encouraged the Residents to avoid displays of generosity where possible. For instance, the Governor-General-in-Council approved the expenses necessary for Richard Jenkins to host entertainments at the Nagpur Residency upon the marriage of the Rajah of Berar's daughter, because 'this compliment would be expected in conformity to the usage observed on former occasions of a similar nature', but nevertheless cautioned the Resident that such expenses, 'should, if possible, be avoided in future', urging the Resident consider 'in what manner our intentions in this respect can be effected [...] without subjecting our public Residents to the imputation of being deficient in the usual forms of civility and attention.'<sup>26</sup> Residents were expected to keep detailed records of the presents that were disbursed, their value, and the reasons for their conferment. If the Resident failed to satisfy the Civil Auditor as to the validity and political necessity of the gift, the Company would refuse to cover the cost.<sup>27</sup> When it came to the receipt of gifts, the Company's position was equally strict. In an attempt to obviate

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<sup>24</sup> Brittlebank, *Tipu Sultan's Search for Legitimacy*, p. 119. See also Indira Viswanathan Peterson, 'The cabinet of King Serfoji of Tanjore: A European collection in early nineteenth century India', *The Journal of the History of Collections*, 1:1 (1999): 71-93.

<sup>25</sup> Valentia, *Voyages and Travels*, 144. Rosie Lewellyn-Jones describes the collections of Asaf-ud-Daula and his successors in *A fatal friendship: The Nawabs, the British, and the city of Lucknow* (Delhi, 1985), p. 59-61 and *Engaging scoundrels: True tales of old Lucknow* (Delhi, 2000), p. 34.

<sup>26</sup> Extract Political Letter to Bengal, 14 Sept. 1808, BC, IOR/F/4/308/7060, OIOC, p. 1.

<sup>27</sup> William Morton to Arthur Henry Cole, 5 Feb. 1816, BC, IOR/F/4/527/12633, OIOC, p. 30.

corruption, in 1773 the Board of Control instituted a Regulating Act which expressly forbade Britons from receiving gifts of land, jewels, and money.<sup>28</sup> While the Residents continued to exchange *nazr*, *peshkash*, and *khilat*, the items which the Residents were given in return were never kept by them personally. Instead, the Residents compiled records of the objects they received and their monetary value; these items were then added to the *toshakhana*, a public treasury of ritual presents. These presents could be given again to a different person on a later occasion, or could be sold in Calcutta and the proceeds used to buy more presents.<sup>29</sup>

The obvious rationale behind this policy of stringent account-keeping was the desire to avoid unnecessary expense given that the East India Company was mired in debt. In large part the ever-increasing deficit was a result of recurring warfare with Indian regional powers dating back to the mid-eighteenth century. It was not helped, however, by the wider context of the Revolutionary and Napoleonic Wars then raging across the globe. The wars not only limited trade with Europe, but created a steep upswing in French privateering in the Indian Ocean. The British government was also feeling the strain of wartime expenditures, to the point that its financial aid had to be bought with concessions, for instance, surrendering trading privileges or allowing the navy the use of Company ships. In this position of financial embarrassment, it is unsurprising that the Company sought to institute a policy of the strictest economy when it came to the purchase of political gifts.<sup>30</sup>

The efforts of the Governor-General-in-Council to monitor the Residents' participation in gift exchanges were also influenced by public opinion in Britain, and can be attributed in part to the recent history of the Company and the criticism to which it had been subject. In the mid-eighteenth century the Company's growing political and administrative role in India had introduced new opportunities for profit, what diplomatist and Indian administrator John Malcolm in his 1826 *Political history of India* termed 'the golden harvest which, about this period, opened up in the East'.<sup>31</sup> With more of its servants returning to England with huge and ill-gotten fortunes, the Company quickly fell into disrepute; many of its former employees were subjected to painfully public parliamentary inquiries, most famously the dramatic impeachment trial of Warren Hastings. In consequence, the late eighteenth century witnessed a series of reforms designed to rehabilitate the Company's

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<sup>28</sup> Natasha Eaton, 'Between mimesis and alterity: Art, gift, and diplomacy in colonial India, 1770-1800', *CSSH*, 46:4 (2004): 819.

<sup>29</sup> Cohn, 'Representing authority in Victorian India,' p. 639-640.

<sup>30</sup> For this paragraph, see C. H. Philips, *The East India Company 1784-1834* (Manchester, 1961), p. 151-155.

<sup>31</sup> Bernard S. Cohn, 'Recruitment and training of British civil servants in India, 1600-1860', in *Asian bureaucratic systems emergent from the British imperial tradition*, ed. Ralph Braibanti (Durham, NC, 1966), p. 93; John Malcolm, *The political history of India, from 1784 to 1823* (London, 1826), p. 32.

public image: in addition to the institution of the aforementioned 1773 Regulating Act, a parliamentary Board of Control was appointed to oversee the Company's operations and Company officials were granted pay increases to deter them from engaging in corruption and private trading.<sup>32</sup> The upper echelons of the Company were wary of the ways in which the exchange of gifts could verge on corruption, and were therefore keen to regulate it. The Residents, given their geographically distant and relatively solitary position at Indian courts, as well as their close engagement with Indian political figures, were (unsurprisingly) special objects of scrutiny and suspicion in this regard.

It is difficult to determine to what extent, if at all, the Residents did accept gifts from the Indian political elite. On one occasion, at least, James Achilles Kirkpatrick was presented with a valuable diamond ring as a sign of the Nizam's favour which he appears to have kept for himself.<sup>33</sup> These kinds of gifts are almost never mentioned in the Residents' official or unofficial correspondence, but then Company regulations would have dictated against Residents reporting these gifts if they had sought to profit from them, and it is possible that Residents would also have felt reticent about mentioning them to family or friends. Perhaps as a result, to the extent that gifts from Indians are discussed in the Residents' correspondence, it is normally to say that they have been rejected. For example, Henry Russell mentions in a letter to his brother Charles that he has accepted a pair of shawls sent by Azizullah (the Residency munshi at Hyderabad), but has rejected the offer of a horse; in his words, 'it is hardly the sort of Present that suits our relative situation; and is besides, in Point of Value, more than he ought to give with Prudence or I to accept with Propriety'.<sup>34</sup> In this case the gift was probably mentioned because Charles (then Assistant Resident at Hyderabad) was the channel through which the gift reached Russell; the horse was likely considered inappropriate because Azizullah, as an employee of the Resident at Hyderabad, was subordinate to Russell (who had just accepted a position as Resident there). To accept such an expensive gift would have invested Azizullah with a dignity above his station, while placing Russell in a position of debt. Similarly, when Mountstuart Elphinstone was offered a piece of land by the Rajah of Berar, he interpreted the gift to mean that 'the Raja thought it material to have favorable representations given of his conduct'. Elphinstone claimed to treat the offer with 'ridicule & contempt', mentioning it only because, in the context of Elphinstone's attempts to negotiate a

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<sup>32</sup> Travers, *Ideology and empire*, p. 211; Bowen, *The business of empire*, p. 182; Eaton, 'Between mimesis and alterity', p. 819.

<sup>33</sup> J. A. Kirkpatrick estimated the value of the diamond ring at a thousand pounds. J.A. Kirkpatrick to William Kirkpatrick, 12 Oct. 1800, Private letters from his brother James Achilles Kirkpatrick, Papers of Maj-Gen William Kirkpatrick, Mss Eur F228/12, OIOC, p. 215.

<sup>34</sup> Henry Russell to Charles Russell, 18 Dec. 1810, Russell Papers, MSS. Eng. lett. D. 152, Bodl. Oxf., p. 62.

treaty with the Rajah, the offer seemed to suggest that the Rajah was inclined to a rapprochement with the Company.<sup>35</sup> In both cases the acceptance of the gift would have been onerous to the Resident, whether by conferring prestige on an inferior (as in Russell's case) or by placing an obligation on the Resident to reciprocate (as with Elphinstone). It is possible that Residents preferred to maintain their status and freedom of action rather than to accept gifts that might have placed them in a difficult position at court or contravened Company regulations.

At the same time, it is equally possible that Residents sought to take advantage of their more or less isolated position, endeavouring to make their fortune and return home in the shortest possible time frame. Writing to a family friend in Scotland on the subject of his personal finances, Archibald Seton alluded to the nabob's reputation for corruption and noted that 'it had been easy for me, had I been that which Indians are frequently said to be, to have brought home with me as many pounds as I shall bring rupees'. According to Seton, 'the law could not have checked me discovery could not have followed, but *in foro conscientiae* that most just and most formidable of all tribunals I should have stood condemned'. In Seton's view, all the money in the world was not worth 'the sad sacrifice of a mans own esteem', but it is hard to say how many of the Residents made a similar appraisal, given that, according to Seton, they had only their own consciences to answer to.<sup>36</sup>

## 2. A comparison of Indian and British gift-giving regimes

Although these practicalities had an important bearing on Company policy on gift-giving, this does not mean that Company officials were blind to the symbolic dimensions of gift-giving, or that they did not take this aspect of the exchange into account when considering what kinds of presents to give and when. This is how the official attitude towards gift-giving has been interpreted in the past; Bernard Cohn famously contended that Britons were liable to dismiss the giving of gifts as bribery because they viewed these exchanges as purely economic in nature and function, construing the goods thus exchanged as mere commodities, ignoring their social and symbolic overtones.<sup>37</sup> Such an assumption, however, postulates a radical difference between Britons and Indians, identifying the former as modern and capitalist, the latter, implicitly, as something other. This dichotomy has a long history within the anthropological discipline; to quote Natasha Eaton, 'most ethnographies of gift would have us believe that its locale is the non-occidental world, blatantly disregarding that

<sup>35</sup> Mountstuart Elphinstone to John Adam, 1 Jan. 1805, Papers of John Adam, Mss Eur F109/89, OIOC, n.p.

<sup>36</sup> Archibald Seton to Henry Steuart, 18 Dec. 1808, Seton of Touch Papers, MS 19208, NLS, p. 100.

<sup>37</sup> Cohn, 'Representing authority in Victorian India', p. 163.



the West has its own gift institutions[.]’<sup>38</sup> Beginning with Mauss, anthropologists have particularly associated gift exchange with small-scale non-industrial societies, drawing sharp distinctions between gifts and commodities and the theatres in which these exchanges take place.<sup>39</sup> This traditional opposition between gifts and commodities has been controverted by recent studies which demonstrate the overlap between these two modes of exchange. In an edited collection entitled *Money and the morality of exchange*, editors Jonathan Parry and Maurice Bloch assembled a series of case studies which together pointed to huge cultural variation in terms of the way in which monetary transactions are understood and engaged in, while at the same time suggesting that all over the world there is often a perceived connection between short-term exchanges and long-term relationships; in other words, that apparently straightforward economic transactions can still be and often are symbolic, culturally contingent, and highly social.<sup>40</sup>

Indeed, while Britons in India might have treated particular instances of gift-giving with disdain, this by no means signified their disregard for the social and symbolic dimensions of these exchanges in general. For instance, although on the face of it T.D. Broughton’s description of the exchange of *khilat* and *nazr* at Sindhia’s court in his published account of his time with the Marathas would seem to substantiate Cohn’s claim, a closer reading suggests a rather different conclusion. Broughton, the captain of the Resident’s escort, grumbled that at Sindhia’s camp the presentation of gifts, and particularly *khilats*, ‘is considered more as a matter of bargain and sale than as a compliment’. For Broughton, ‘[t]here is something very repugnant to European ideas of delicacy in the mode of conducting this part of an entertainment [the exchange of *khilats*]; especially at a Mahratta Durbar’. Broughton proceeded to complain that ‘at this court the *Khiluts* are notoriously bad; and the Muha Raj always seizes the opportunity to get rid of a lame horse or a foundered elephant’, while at the same time noting with contempt how ‘some of his Surdars return a pair of shawls, which they did not like, and desire that they might be changed; with as little delicacy as if they had purchased them at a shop.’<sup>41</sup> The Maratha officials, in other words, were criticized precisely because they seem to confuse gifts, imbued with sentimental and symbolic value, with commodities.

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<sup>38</sup> Eaton, ‘Between mimesis and alterity’, p. 17.

<sup>39</sup> Wim M.J. van Binsbergen, ‘Commodification: Things, agency, and identities: introduction’, in *Commodification: Things, agency and identities (the social life of things revisited)*, eds. Wim M.J. van Binsbergen and Peter L. Geschiere (Munster, 2005), p. 20.

<sup>40</sup> Jonathan Parry and Maurice Bloch (eds.), *Money and the morality of exchange* (Cambridge, 1989), p. 1-2.

<sup>41</sup> Broughton, *Letters written in a Mahratta camp*, p. 95-96.

The British in India would have been well-versed in the symbolic and social dimensions of gift exchange since gift-giving played an important part in eighteenth-century British social life. Some Residents imply in their letters that they regarded the exchange of gifts as a particularly Indian phenomenon, but their assertions on this point should be read critically. These men were effectively engaging in what legal historian Anthony Anghie has termed the ‘dynamic of difference,’ the ‘process of creating a gap between two cultures, demarcating one as universal and civilized, and the other as particular and uncivilized’.<sup>42</sup> Mountstuart Elphinstone, for instance, claimed that Indians invested gifts with an importance ‘of which a man of sense could have no idea’. He further expressed the view that ‘a few such gifts conciliate the natives more than a long course of fair & honourable conduct joined to the gentlest behaviour. They are all fools & children to a man.’<sup>43</sup> Yet Elphinstone himself regularly exchanged gifts with friends in India, and never reacted with anything less than delight when favoured with a present; he lauded his friend Edward Strachey as ‘the prince of good fellows & pride of old men’ for having sent a pair of boots, though Elphinstone opined that no half boots were to be had, he being ‘now under the mortifying necessity of going to dinner in silk stockings which I fancy is rather scandalous.’<sup>44</sup>

As the example of Mountstuart Elphinstone suggests, British gentlemen (and women) routinely exchanged gifts as a means of cementing relationships. Historians of eighteenth-century Britain have convincingly demonstrated the important social functions which these gifts were recognized to have. Charitable giving endowed the giver with status and marked out vertical ties within the community, while the exchange of gifts between friends and kin created and consolidated horizontal connections.<sup>45</sup> Recipients might well be aware of the financial worth of the gift, but its value just as often inhered in its social or sentimental connotations; portraits for example were particularly valued because they presented a means of bridging the geographical distance separating friends and relatives.<sup>46</sup> In diplomatic and mercantile contexts, as well, there was a long tradition of presenting gifts as a means of

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<sup>42</sup> Anghie, *Imperialism, sovereignty, and the making of international law*, p. 4.

<sup>43</sup> Mountstuart Elphinstone to John Adam, 18 Ap. 1804, Papers of John Adam, Mss Eur F109/88, OIOC, n.p.

<sup>44</sup> Mountstuart Elphinstone to Edward Strachey, 23 Aug. 1803, Letters to Edward Strachey from Mountstuart Elphinstone, Sutton Court Collection, Mss Eur F128/163, OIOC, n.p.

<sup>45</sup> Ilana Krausman Ben-Amos, *The culture of giving: Informal support and gift-exchange in early modern England* (Cambridge, 2008), p. 195; Amanda Vickery, *The gentleman's daughter: Women's lives in Georgian England* (New Haven, CT, 1998), p. 209; Margot Finn, ‘Men's things: Masculine possession in the Consumer Revolution’, *Social History*, 25:2 (2000): 146; 148; Margot Finn, ‘Colonial gifts: Family politics and the exchange of goods in British India, c. 1780–1820’, *MAS*, 40:1 (2006): 203–31.

<sup>46</sup> Richard Jenkins, the Resident at Nagpur, begged his mother for portraits of her and his sisters, urging her to spare no expense on ‘what will be to me an inestimable treasure’. Richard Jenkins to his mother, 28 Dec. 1813, Letter books of Sir Richard Jenkins, Mss Eur E111, OIOC, p. 210.

establishing relationships, signalling mutual respect and the desire for mutual benefit.<sup>47</sup> Gift-giving, then, operated in a broadly similar way, in British as in Indian society, as a kind of social and political glue, imbued with meanings which were not strictly tied to the economic value of the object changing hands.

Putting aside some of the basic similarities between British and Indian ideas about gift-giving, a long history of political transactions with Indian royalty meant that members of the Company's political line had developed at least an elementary understanding of Indian gifting conventions, even where they differed from British traditions. As Sanjay Subrahmanyam has pointed out, 'states and empires were very rarely ships that passed in the night of incommensurability'.<sup>48</sup> It was possible for Europeans and non-Europeans to arrive at a mutual understanding, even though such an understanding required some effort to construct. On both sides of the encounter, the giver and the recipient took steps to ensure that their actions would be understood. For instance, Indian rulers often made explicit precisely how they wished a gift to be interpreted, usually through an accompanying letter. In their return letters, British officials in India likewise openly alluded to the meanings underlying their receipt of gifts from Indian nobility, signalling their awareness of the gift's symbolic value. The Earl of Minto specifically thanked the royal women of Delhi for their gifts of shawls, whose 'principal value', he wrote, 'consists in their having been worn by persons of your royal Highness's rank.' Such a present was, he recognised, 'a distinguished mark of favor and condescension'.<sup>49</sup>

In cases where the norms governing gift-giving practices were less transparent, Residents could draw on the expertise of the munshis who acted as secretaries and political agents, or the ministers who so often mediated between the Resident and the monarch.<sup>50</sup> In cases where the Resident appeared blind to the implications of a failure to follow the proper protocol, the minister or munshi could alert him to the meanings that might be read into such an act. For instance, the minister at Hyderabad intervened when Thomas Sydenham neglected to host the Nizam of Hyderabad at his Residency. Sydenham recognized that such an occasion would require him to present the Nizam with presents and would therefore put the Company to considerable expense, but the minister convinced Sydenham of the necessity of the

<sup>47</sup> Klekar, "'Prisoners in silken bonds'", p. 84-105; Maija Jansson, 'Measured reciprocity', p. 348-370.

<sup>48</sup> Sanjay Subrahmanyam, *Courtly encounters: Translating courtliness and violence in early modern Eurasia* (Cambridge, MA, 2012), p. 29.

<sup>49</sup> Earl of Minto to Koodseea Begum, 8 Mar. 1809, Out-letters 1809, Minto Papers, MS 11579, NLS, p. 32.

<sup>50</sup> For example J.A. Kirkpatrick to William Kirkpatrick, 28 Oct. 1799, Private letters from his brother James Achilles Kirkpatrick, Papers of Maj-Gen William Kirkpatrick, Mss Eur F228/11, OIOC, p. 277.

measure by pointing out that it ‘would be extremely gratifying to his Highness and might conduce to a familiar Intercourse between his Highness and myself [Sydenham]’.<sup>51</sup>

Company officials were not only aware of the symbolic connotations of particular kinds of gift-giving; they also accorded great political significance to these exchanges. This is manifest in the way in which officials in the political line monitored and attempted to control the exchange of gifts between Indian rulers. Company administrators were particularly keen to preclude the exchange of gifts between the Maratha chieftains, who had jointly dominated central India in the earlier decades of the eighteenth-century. In 1803, the Company signed a treaty with the nominal head of the Marathas, the Peshwa of Poona, which was meant to dissolve the confederacy and position the Company as chief mediator between the different Maratha courts. In an effort to cement this new political configuration, the Residents refused to allow the Marathas to exchange the traditional gifts of coin and ceremonial robes; most notably, the Resident at Poona repeatedly denied the Maratha ruler Holkar the right to offer presents to the Peshwa, as Holkar had done every year before the Treaty of Bassein was signed. The Resident equally denied Holkar the right to a robe of investiture, traditionally offered by the Peshwa of Poona to Maratha royal heirs as a public recognition of their right to succeed. The Resident’s justification for refusing these requests was that they implied a pre-eminence on the part of the Peshwa contrary to the stipulations of the treaty, which was supposed to have placed the Maratha chieftains on an equal footing. Maratha aspirations to give and receive gifts were clearly taken seriously, since the Resident Barry Close (then absent on military campaigns) informed his substitute at court that ‘as the question is of a very delicate nature, I shall be happy if you will correspond with me minutely on every point that may occur relating to its future agitation or progress’.<sup>52</sup>

The Company’s attention to the political implications of such exchanges is equally exemplified by the way in which its representatives attempted to manipulate these rituals to accentuate their own status. To some extent, participation in these rituals of exchange helped to naturalise the Company’s relationship with Indian powers, effectively masking their asymmetry by outwardly maintaining all the conventional forms of Indian diplomacy which traditionally characterized relationships between allies. In this case, Bourdieu’s theories on the gift would seem to be borne out: gift-giving functioned as ‘a kind of social alchemy’ transforming ‘overt domination into misrecognized, “socially recognized” domination, in other words, *legitimate authority*’.<sup>53</sup> At the same time, high-ranking officials within the

<sup>51</sup> Thomas Sydenham to Earl of Minto, 26 Aug. 1808, BC, IOR/F/4/296/6833, OIOC, p. 29-30.

<sup>52</sup> Barry Close to William Hamilton, 24 Sept. 1809, in *Poona records*, vol. VII, p. 410. Holkar continued to make such applications during the Residency of Close’s successor, Mountstuart Elphinstone; see *Poona records*, vol. XII, p. 5, 17, and 20, for example.

<sup>53</sup> Pierre Bourdieu, *Outline of a theory of practice*, trans. Richard Nice (Cambridge, 1987), p. 192.

Company were keen to ensure that their participation in these rituals did not undermine their position of power. Governor-General Richard Wellesley accepted gifts of ceremonial cloth from Indian rulers on his tour of the Northwest Provinces, but insisted that these robes be presented to him on trays rather than ritually draped over his person. In this way, Wellesley attenuated the incorporative function of the ritual, which was meant to subordinate him to the Indian ruler in question.<sup>54</sup> A few years later, when the Mughal Emperor dispatched an emissary to present Governor-General Minto with an honorary dress, Minto angrily refused to accede to what he considered to be 'a public acknowledgement of vassalage and submission on the part of the British Government to the throne of Delhi'.<sup>55</sup> Minto's successor, the Marquess of Hastings, similarly denied the Emperor's request to bestow him with a *khilat*; Hastings bypassed Delhi altogether on his tour of the Upper Provinces, anxious to avoid 'a ceremonial which was to imply his Majesty's being the liege lord of the British possessions'.<sup>56</sup> Not wishing to offend the king, Hastings did send a deputation to Delhi with prominent members of his escort, who were instructed to present *nazrs* on their own individual account. Hastings' escort also presented the Emperor with a 'gaudy state chariot', while Hastings himself recorded in his diary that 'as an article of convenience and splendour, it was the most striking that I could send; and I wished to show the attention, as I had so much shorn the pretensions of his Majesty to supremacy'.<sup>57</sup> The fact that Hastings was still willing to furnish the Emperor with the expensive present of a richly decorated carriage suggests that the issue was not the monetary expense incurred by the exchange of gifts; the objection, clearly, was to the meanings that would be read into Hastings' acceptance of particular kinds of presents.

The Residents for their part did participate in such rituals of subservience to Indian rulers. At the same time, they still turned the ritual to their advantage by dispensing ceremonial robes of their own to courtiers and officials, thereby establishing themselves as centers of power and patronage in their own right.<sup>58</sup> For instance, following the construction of a water tank in Hyderabad the Resident Henry Russell requested to be present at the ceremonial opening; once there, Russell dispensed gifts of shawls and money to the minister's

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<sup>54</sup> Viscount George Valentia, *Voyages and travels in India, Ceylon, the Red Sea, Abyssinia, and Egypt*, 2 vols., (London, 1809), vol. I, p. 99.

<sup>55</sup> Extract Political Letter to Bengal, 4 Sept. 1811, BC, IOR/F/4/393/10009, p. 2-3.

<sup>56</sup> Bute, *The private journal of the Marquess of Hastings*, p. 318.

<sup>57</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 330.

<sup>58</sup> Mountstuart Elphinstone recommends this tactic in Report on the Deckan, Elphinstone Collection, Mss Eur F88/219, OIOC, p. 92. See Query by the Civil Auditor at Madras, BC, IOR/F/4/527/12633, OIOC, p. 30 for description of shawls presented by Resident of Mysore to his munshi and other servants. See descriptions of similar offerings by a Resident to his munshi in Richard Strachey to J.W. Sherer, 14 Mar. 1812, Richard Strachey Papers, Mss Eur D514/1, OIOC, p. 85.

servants who had superintended the work, thereby stressing his instrumental role in ensuring the tank's completion.<sup>59</sup> As we shall see in Chapter 4, Residents also regularly made public gifts of *khilat* to their munshis as a way of visibly co-opting the munshi's social and cultural capital and marking the munshi out as his agent. These rituals were thus an important plank in the Resident's representational strategies.

Though recognising the value of such activities, Company auditors and administrators in Calcutta, Madras, and Bombay were broadly uncomfortable with this facet of Indian political culture, and accordingly tried to limit and, in their view, rationalise these practices. Company administrators actively sought to transform the exchange of gifts into something more commoditised and controlled, and, in so doing, to limit expenses and to confine relationships between the Company and the Indian elite within a narrowly contractual sphere. For instance, the Company administration urged the Residents to treat the exchange of coins and ceremonial robes as a direct transaction congruent with the exchange of commodities for money, which entailed giving only gifts whose value they might expect to receive directly in return.<sup>60</sup> Where services were rendered, the Company preferred the Resident to pay for them in cash rather than reciprocating with presents. The Civil Auditor of Madras chastised Arthur Henry Cole for presenting two shawl pieces to the Rajah of Coorg in recompense for repairs to an elephant saddle, since the shawls were valued at a higher price than the saddle itself.<sup>61</sup> This kind of assiduous account-keeping meant that the meaningful exchange of gifts could sometimes have the appearance of degenerating into an empty exercise. In her travel journal, Lady Hood, a visitor to the court of Mysore, described such an exchange of jewels between the Resident and the Rajah: 'this reciprocation of presents,' she wrote, 'was rather farcical, as they were on both sides to be lodged next day in the Company's treasury and put to the account of Debtor and Creditor.'<sup>62</sup> Still, by attempting to regulate gift-giving in this way, Company administrators were not simply betraying their ignorance of Indian political culture. Rather, they were seeking to force Indian political practices into a more narrowly defined framework of their choosing, thereby cutting down on costs, limiting relationships of obligation, and preventing Company representatives from becoming too deeply embedded in courtly society.

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<sup>59</sup> Henry Russell to N. B. Edmonstone, 10 Aug. 1812, BC, F/4/403/10119, OIOC, p. 4-5.

<sup>60</sup> Query by the Civil Auditor at Madras, BC, IOR/F/4/527/12633, OIOC, p. 28.

<sup>61</sup> George Moore, Civil Auditor, to Chief Secretary to Government, 24 Nov. 1815, BC, IOR/F/4/527/12633, OIOC, p. 6.

<sup>62</sup> Lady Hood, 'Sketch of a journey to Seringapatam & Mysoor', Seaforth Papers, GD46/17/39, NAS, p. 117. See also Mundy, *Pen and pencil sketches*, vol. I, p. 19-20.

Company administrators often found it difficult to enforce such strict reciprocity, however. For one thing, it was impossible to anticipate how a gift would be reciprocated. Sometimes a generous gift would be purchased, according to the high status of the recipient, and a mere token would be given in return. The brother of the Peshwa of Poona, though he was greeted with a rich array of presents upon his arrival at the city of Benares, reciprocated with very paltry gifts, including a horse so old and broken down that the Resident had to prevail on an old *fakir* to take the animal off his hands.<sup>63</sup> Circumstances beyond the Resident's control also sometimes dictated the giving of gifts where there could be no assurance of reciprocity, for instance at birthdays or weddings. Finally, the Resident's pre-eminence at court sometimes precluded him from receiving gifts in turn. The Resident at Hyderabad James Achilles Kirkpatrick objected to the Company's emphasis on total reciprocity on the grounds that his position of high distinction actually prohibited this kind of equivalence. Out of respect for his position, visitors to Hyderabad were expected to pay Kirkpatrick the first visit. Kirkpatrick, for his part, rarely repaid that visit except as a mark of special respect and attention. This meant that Kirkpatrick could not expect to be reimbursed in kind for his munificence, since it was the host who was normally responsible for offering presents to his guests.<sup>64</sup> The lack of equivalence between the gifts given, and gifts received, signalled and at the same time cemented Kirkpatrick's pre-eminence.

As the example of Kirkpatrick suggests, the Residents themselves sometimes chafed at financial restraints imposed on them from on high. Through the lens of gift-giving, one can discern a split between Company auditors in government headquarters and the Resident on the ground. Gifts were a means of expressing the Resident's prestige, and Residents were resentful of anything which tended to limit or undermine the expression of that social cachet. The political importance attributed to such exchanges by the Resident is reflected by the fact that the Resident at Travancore issued a formal objection to the Governor General when the Commercial Resident at Anjengo made a present to the Raja of Travancore at a marriage ceremony. Although the Resident referred to the presents as 'trifling', the issue was considered significant enough to prohibit further communication between the Commercial Resident and the court at Travancore on the basis that it undermined the Resident's personal influence and authority at the court.<sup>65</sup> As this example suggests, gift exchange was one of the most effective means of conciliating figures of political import, and Residents therefore defended gift-giving as an important component of their political toolkit. Consequently, many

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<sup>63</sup> T. Brooke to W.A. Brooke, 1 Aug. 1808, Letters received by the agent to the Governor-General Jan.-Jul. 1805, Benares Residency Records, basta no. 11, book no. 46, UPSAA, p. 160;162.

<sup>64</sup> J.A. Kirkpatrick to John Lumsden, 17 Jun. 1800, Papers relating to James Achilles Kirkpatrick's career, Papers of Maj-Gen William Kirkpatrick, Mss Eur F228/82, OIOC, p. 19-20.

<sup>65</sup> Colin Macaulay to Government at Fort St. George, 27 Aug. 1807, BC, IOR/F/4/244/5536, OIOC, p. 52-53.

Residents found the administration's emphasis on money frustrating because the exchange of gifts clearly had social and political implications which could not be tallied in terms of rupees spent or received. As Bourdieu argued in his influential theory of the gift, gift-giving, though seemingly disinterested, is often motivated by the desire to translate one's wealth into influence and social prestige.<sup>66</sup> While the Resident's superiors sought to shore up the Company's stock of economic capital, from the Resident's perspective this money was practically meaningless. A capital of obligations and debts, by comparison, could help the Resident to do his job by ensuring the cooperation of important figures at court. From the Residents' perspective, money on gift-giving could hardly be considered lost, merely transformed into a more useful currency.

This clash between Residents and Company auditors on the question of gifts was merely one important flashpoint in a broader field of combat, namely, the Resident's expense claims. The Residents and their superiors debated, not just the validity of particular expenses, but also the limits to be set to the Residency's monthly expense claims more generally. These disagreements were symptomatic of larger uncertainties, concerning the vague boundary between the Resident's public and private life as well as the uncertain nature of the Company's influence over these Indian states and how that influence should manifest itself. These squabbles over money, though no doubt motivated to some degree by the personal interests of the people involved, are therefore more revealing than they might at first appear about the shifting and ill-defined nature of the Residency system in its early years.

### **3. Debating the political value of pageantry**

In a letter to his sister, Emily, the Resident Charles Theophilus Metcalfe expressed his frustration with the course his career in the political line had taken, noting regretfully that he had long significantly exceeded his income and had little hope of reducing his expenses in future. 'This is such a backward way of making a fortune', he admitted, 'that I must consider what I have as all I shall ever have; and entertain no hope of any further savings; as I am not sensible of any extravagant outlays that could be avoided with any adequate effect'.<sup>67</sup> The problems experienced by Metcalfe and other members of the political line inhered in the nature of their work; instead of being paid a sum of money that was their own to dispose of as they would, the Residents were paid only a small salary in addition to an expense allowance which many Residents found it hard not to exceed.<sup>68</sup> In addition to the money spent on

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<sup>66</sup> Bourdieu, *Outline of a theory of practice*, p. 192.

<sup>67</sup> C.T. Metcalfe to Emily Viscountess Ashbrook, 14 Dec. 1824, Metcalfe Family Papers, Monson Papers, MON/28/B/23/16, Lincolnshire Archives, Lincoln, n.p.

<sup>68</sup> Henry Russell to John Adam, Sept. 5 1816, Notes and intelligence of Mountstuart Elphinstone regarding the Peshwa and Trimbuckjee, Mountstuart Elphinstone Collection, Mss Eur F88/60, OIOC, p. 149.



political presents, the Residents and the Civil Auditor also disputed expenses associated with hospitality, equipage, and the upkeep and renovation of Residency buildings.

The question of how much money Residents could legitimately claim was a vexed one. On one side of the question, many individuals within the Company, in addition to the Residents themselves, argued for the political necessity of large monthly stipends. These claims were founded mostly on contemporary stereotypes of Indian political culture.<sup>69</sup> Conventional wisdom was that so-called Oriental polities vested great weight in appearances, and many Company employees expressed the belief that Indians straightforwardly equated conspicuous displays of affluence with power. Governor-General Marquess Hastings himself defended the expenses of the Residents on the grounds that ‘the native Chiefs have seen Power and a certain degree of parade so invariably identified, that they cannot disconnect the notions’. Accordingly, a measure of magnificence was essential ‘to prevent the Residents’ appearing in a discreditable contrast before those who can only judge by the Eye’.<sup>70</sup> Some contemporaries certainly seem to have recognised the mythic dimensions of this stereotype. Henry Russell described with amusement his father’s disappointment upon first sight of the Nizam’s palace, repeating Henry Russell Sr.’s complaint that the only establishment he had seen in Indian which he considered entitled to be called a palace was the Hyderabad Residency. Russell concluded the anecdote by remarking that ‘People in Europe are very apt to form their notions of Oriental splendour upon the Arabian Nights, and other Tales of the same kind, and are therefore sure to be disappointed.’<sup>71</sup> Still, even men with long experience of India were apt to cast Indian monarchs into this stereotypical mould. Russell, though he made light of his father’s assumptions about Oriental grandeur, nevertheless made a point of attending carefully to ceremony and appearances, noting to his brother that ‘the influence of state at Hyderabad is so powerful, that I mean on all Occasions to keep up as much of it as I can’.<sup>72</sup>

Though greatly exaggerated by British commentators, royal legitimacy in India did depend to some extent on the ability to project one’s power through visual spectacle. The king was meant to dazzle his subjects with an appearance of splendour and majesty, reflecting his association with the divine.<sup>73</sup> In this case however Britons in India were again discursively

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<sup>69</sup> C.T. Metcalfe to John Adam, 23 Jul. 1815, BC, IOR/F/4/552/13387, OIOC, p. 43; Archibald Seton to John Adam, Oct. 25 1816, BC, IOR/F/4/552/13387, OIOC, p. 87.

<sup>70</sup> The Marquess of Hastings to the Court of Directors, 27 Oct. 1816, BC, IOR/F/4/552/13387, OIOC, p. 74-75.

<sup>71</sup> Henry Russell to Charles Russell, Feb. 1813, Russell Papers, MS. Eng. lett. d. 164, Bodl. Oxf., p. 15.

<sup>72</sup> Henry Russell to Charles Russell, 1 Apr. 1811, Russell Papers, MSS. Eng. lett. d. 152, Bodl. Oxf., p. 153. See also Henry Russell to N.B. Edmonstone, 31 Aug. 1811, BC, IOR/F/4/372/9248, OIOC, p. 45.

<sup>73</sup> Brittlebank, *Tipu Sultan’s search for legitimacy*, p. 131.

distancing themselves from a feature of Indian society which was broadly congruent to the attention accorded to appearances in the European world. After all, Europeans also drew associations between power, status, and visible grandeur. Historian Tim Blanning has famously traced the ways in which European monarchs sought to express their authority and legitimacy visually in the eighteenth century, whether within the confines of the royal court or in view of the broader public.<sup>74</sup> At the highest levels, ceremonial costume served to distinguish and reinforce the rights and privileges of the monarch and the aristocracy. Among the general population, too, clothes signalled a person's rank and status.<sup>75</sup> The idea that the Resident and his Residency ought to be arrayed in grand fashion, in a manner which adequately represented the standing of the Company, thus accorded with British assumptions concerning the relationship between power and appearances.

At the same time, Britons also possessed a particularly charged notion of 'luxury' and its debilitating power. This concept was pervasive in eighteenth-century British discourse owing to its central place in the classical and Christian tradition. In principle, luxury bespoke the kind of absorption in one's own material well-being which, on the one hand, signalled a disregard for the wellbeing of others, and on the other, a repudiation of God and his spiritual kingdom. Historically, luxury was associated with Roman imperial decline; according to the widely cited Roman moralist Sallust, luxury was imported to Rome from Asia by the returning army, resulting in a civilizational collapse that was at once moral, social, and political.<sup>76</sup> Given the extent to which Roman history served as a model and a frame of reference for the British empire in the late eighteenth century, it should come as no surprise that the adoption of an Indian lifestyle was similarly feared to have a morally corrosive effect on Britons sojourning there.<sup>77</sup> The Resident at Sindhia's court from 1798 to 1804, nicknamed 'King Collins', was perhaps the classic example of what James Mackintosh termed '*the Sultanised Englishman*'.<sup>78</sup> Visitors to Company Residencies often commented on the Residents' seeming addiction to grandeur (or, perhaps equally telling, expressed surprise

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<sup>74</sup> T.C.W. Blanning, *The culture of power and the power of culture: Old regime Europe 1660-1789* (Oxford, 2002), p. 5.

<sup>75</sup> Aileen Ribeiro, *Dress in eighteenth-century Europe 1715-1789* (London, 1984), p. 115-131.

<sup>76</sup> John Sekora, *Luxury: The concept in western thought, Eden to Smollett* (Baltimore, MD, 1977), p. 2;9;37.

<sup>77</sup> Philip Ayres, *Classical culture and the idea of Rome in eighteenth-century England* (Cambridge, 1997), p. 42-46.

<sup>78</sup> For a description of John Collins (nicknamed King Collins), see John Blakiston, *Twelve years military adventure in three quarters of the globe* (London, 1829), p. 144. For James Mackintosh's description of the 'Sultanised Englishman' (and his opposite, 'the Braminised Englishman'), see Robert Mackintosh (ed.), *Memoirs of the life of the Right Honorable Sir James Mackintosh*, second edn., (London, 1836), p. 212.

when Residents maintained a kind of dignified moderation).<sup>79</sup> As historian Kathleen Wilson has noted, in the eighteenth century character was considered to be contingent on shared language, laws, government, and social organisation.<sup>80</sup> Far from being taken for granted, the ‘civilisation’ of Britons in India, that quality which supposedly differentiated them from Indians (generally defined as control over oneself through use of reason, judgement, and understanding rather than instinct), was considered exceedingly fragile and in need of protection.<sup>81</sup> Because personalities and behaviours were believed to be intimately related to one’s social and material context, Britons could not necessarily be trusted to continue to act in a civilised manner, that is, in reasoning or virtuous ways, when uprooted from the British context.<sup>82</sup> In line with this conceptualization of the mind and body, engaging in Indian forms of ceremonial and spectacle, and living in the manner of an Indian ruler, could be argued to have pernicious effects on Britons who took up positions of power in India.

On an ideological level, the question of how British prestige ought to be made visible in India was further complicated by the fact that the very nature of the Company’s administration in India, and the source of its legitimacy, was itself contested in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth century. In the mid-eighteenth century, as historian Robert Travers has demonstrated, the British justified their empire in India on the grounds that they were restoring the subcontinent to a pre-Mughal golden age. The Company’s legitimacy derived from the claim that it was introducing a form of government that was more rational and just than that of the Mughals, but which was at the same time consonant with Indian tradition.<sup>83</sup> Administration in such an Indian idiom seemed to require an element of conspicuous consumption and display. Pomp and sumptuousness served both to obscure the Company’s commercial origins and to mark its role as successor to the Mughals. The most obvious example of such stately magnificence was Governor-General Richard Wellesley’s Palladian government house in Calcutta.<sup>84</sup> In his account of his travels to India, Viscount Valentia famously justified his uncle’s building project on the grounds that ‘India is a country of splendor, of extravagance, and of outward appearances’, and that ‘the Head of a mighty empire ought to conform himself to the prejudices of the country he rules over’.<sup>85</sup>

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<sup>79</sup> Maria Nugent described Charles Metcalfe as ‘a plain, sensible young man, without any show or ostentation’, in contrast to John Baillie’s ‘love of display’. Nugent, *A journal from the year 1811 to the year 1815, including a voyage to and residence in India* (London, 1839), p. 408 and 311, respectively.

<sup>80</sup> Kathleen Wilson, *The island race: Englishness, empire and gender in the eighteenth century* (London, 2003), p. 8.

<sup>81</sup> Sheldon Rothblatt, *Tradition and change in English liberal education: An essay in history and culture* (London, 1976), p. 17.

<sup>82</sup> Wilson, *Island race*, p. 8.

<sup>83</sup> Travers, *Ideology and empire*, p. 7.

<sup>84</sup> E.M. Collingham, *Imperial bodies: The physical experience of the Raj, c. 1800-1947* (Cambridge, 2001), p. 20; 15

<sup>85</sup> Valentia, *Voyages and travels*, vol. I, p. 235.

However, as ideas about the Company's role and responsibilities in India began to change, so too did beliefs about how its power ought to be made manifest. In the late eighteenth century, as evangelical and utilitarian ideologies began to gain ground in Britain, commentators both within and without the Company increasingly began to justify the Company's rule in India in terms of the benefits that would accrue to the Indian population through the imposition of supposedly British institutions like private property, rule of law, and Christianity. As the Company's right to rule was increasingly seen to subsist in an inherent British superiority, the Company's administration was accordingly less and less interested in attempting to express its power in what was perceived to be an Indian idiom.<sup>86</sup> Historian E.M. Collingham has charted these ideological shifts, and the ways in which they were reflected in the bodily practices of the Company's colonial administrators. She has noted the decline in Indian pomp and pageantry, situating it within a broader change, namely, the transformation of the nabob, 'the flamboyant, effeminate and wealthy East India Company servant, open to Indian influences and into whose self-identity India was incorporated', into the burra sahib, 'a sober, bureaucratic representative of the Crown'.<sup>87</sup>

Though Collingham's account of this overarching trend is convincing, she perhaps underplays the unevenness of this transition. Dividing her analysis between the nabob and the burra sahib, Collingham passes over the period of overlap, neglecting the ways in which the awkward coexistence of two competing ideologies regarding the Company's rule in India posed practical ambiguities for those responsible for enacting the Company's power on the ground. The gap between these rival systems produced an ongoing tension which the Residents were required to negotiate. Take for example a letter which the Governor-General-in-Council issued to Thomas Sydenham in response to his requests for money to cover the expenses of decorative trappings for elephants and camels. The Council refused to cover Sydenham's bills, arguing that 'the dignity and respectability of the British Representatives should be made to rest as in fact it does on more solid foundations than the maintenance of state and splendour borrowed from the manners & habits of the natives [...], in a great degree inconsistent with our national character'.<sup>88</sup> At the same time, the Council was careful to complicate this hard stance by assuring Sydenham that 'it is not intended to intimate, [...] that it is unnecessary to adapt our Arrangements, in matters of this nature, to the perceptions and prejudices of the Natives of India. A certain degree of pomp and retinue, must in all situations be the concomitant of Rank and Authority'.<sup>89</sup> What were Residents to make of such

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<sup>86</sup> Collingham, *Imperial bodies*, p. 51-52.

<sup>87</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 3.

<sup>88</sup> Extract Political Letter from Bengal, 4 Aug. 1809, BC, IOR/F/4/311/7096, OIOC, p. 8-9.

<sup>89</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 27-28.

equivocation? There was no set model to which the Residents could refer. It is telling that when Mountstuart Elphinstone first took up the position of Resident at Nagpur, his letters are full of questions about the money to be spent on gifts and the degree of state to be maintained at the Residency.<sup>90</sup> His uncertainty, and the priority which he places on his establishment (which he deems ‘so much a public concern’), illustrate the extent to which the matter of the Residency finances was perceived to be a significant problem without a clear solution.

#### **4. Public dignity or private ostentation?**

The desire to regulate the Residents’ monthly expenses can also be situated, to some extent, within broader reformist trends in Britain. In the same way that Pitt and other reformers within the British government sought to systematise the civil service through the payment of salaries in preference to stipends, so too did the Governor-General-in-Council hope that closer scrutiny of the Residents’ expenses would streamline the Company’s operations, saving money and precluding corruption. What rendered the Residents’ expenses particularly problematic in this regard, however, was the difficulty of making clear distinctions between public and private expenses. The Resident was, after all, the Company’s physical embodiment in far-flung Indian kingdoms; it made sense for the Resident to be arrayed in a manner which reflected the Company’s influence. It was therefore difficult to determine a limit to be set to the Resident’s spending, whether on gifts to be dispensed at court, or on carriages and personal attendants. If the sumptuousness of the Resident’s establishment did not match or exceed that of his peers at court, it could, after all, reflect ill on the Company’s power and prosperity.<sup>91</sup>

Residents frequently argued for an increase in their personal allowances by suggesting that their position put them at a financial disadvantage relative to other Company civil servants, since their public responsibilities precluded the frugal habits they might otherwise have espoused. John Munro for instance contrasted his previous life as ‘a private member of society’ when he ‘was at perfect liberty to live in whatever manner might be most suitable to my income or views’, with his current situation where as ‘the Organ of the authority of the British Government, and as ostensibly occupying the first place of the community, I must from considerations of public Duty support the establishments and incur the expences that are necessary for the maintenance of that weight and respect which the

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<sup>90</sup> Mountstuart Elphinstone to John Adam, 13 Apr. 1804, John Adam Papers, Mss Eur F109/88, OIOC, np; Mountstuart Elphinstone to John Adam, 24 Apr. 1804, John Adam Papers, Mss Eur F109/88, OIOC, np.

<sup>91</sup> Thomas Sydenham to N.B. Edmonstone, 7 Aug. 1806, BC, IOR/F/4/311/7096, OIOC, p. 14-15.

Natives attach to certain appearances of state'.<sup>92</sup> The Governor General, when presenting Archibald Seton's claims before the Court of Directors, similarly noted that in Seton's previous role as provincial judge his 'personal habits' had 'admitted of his reserving a portion of his allowances, [...] larger than the amount which he is able to set aside from the Salary of the Resident at Delhi'.<sup>93</sup>

It was near impossible to determine the truth of such statements, however, since the government could only take the Resident at his word when it came to how he had previously disposed of his personal salary, or how he intended to use his present allowances. In support of Archibald Seton's claim for an enlarged monthly allowance, Governor-General Minto assured the Court of Directors of Seton's 'high spirit of public zeal and honour', arguing that he would 'never be induced with views of personal emolument to retrench those personal establishments which are essentially necessary for the maintenance of the dignity and influence of the Government which he presents'.<sup>94</sup> In advancing this argument, however, Minto implicitly admitted the possibility that a Resident could mishandle Company funds in such a manner. Despite his position of public authority, the Resident was also a private person whose own needs or desires might lead him to misrepresent the political necessity of his expenses. Given these conflicting interests, it was difficult to determine whether the Resident was driven by concern for the public good, or his own financial ambitions.

The Resident's geographical distance from administrative centers exacerbated the issue. His isolation rendered him eminently suspect, since his activities were difficult to monitor from government headquarters in Calcutta. At the same time, it was this very distance that allowed the Resident to claim the local expertise necessary to decide on questions relating to the Residency's budget. For instance, in response to the Court of Directors' accusations of exorbitance, Metcalfe defended his expenses by emphasizing the large number of Europeans which he was expected to host at the Residency at Delhi on a routine basis. Metcalfe then proceeded to question 'the equity of a condemnation passed on me by persons, who however high in authority, however respectable individually, however sacred collectively, cannot intuitively judge in London, what expenses may be necessary or superfluous at the Residency at Delhi'.<sup>95</sup> The Resident could boast a kind of localised knowledge that Company administrators in far-away Presidency capitals, let alone London,

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<sup>92</sup> John Munro to Chief Secretary to Government, 16 Mar. 1814, BC, IOR/F/4/481/11553, OIOC, p. 16-17.

<sup>93</sup> Governor General's Minute, 4 Aug. 1809, BC, IOR/F/4/312/7119, OIOC, p. 36.

<sup>94</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 41.

<sup>95</sup> C.T. Metcalfe to John Adam, 23 Jul. 1815, BC, IOR/F/4/552/13387, OIOC, p. 50.

could hardly lay claim to.<sup>96</sup> The Resident was the man on the scene, and accordingly, a better judge of local conceptions of British prestige (or so he claimed).

Moreover, as the Company's agent on the ground the Resident was also the one whose reputation and authority was most directly at stake. Parsimony might, after all, create an impression of weakness and insignificance in the opinion of the court. Henry Russell, Resident at Hyderabad, stubbornly demanded a personal escort of cavalry, which he argued was one of the only marks of distinction which visibly identified him as a figure of public importance at Hyderabad. This visible sign of authority was important, according to Russell, since the local population 'can judge of power and authority by no other standard than the external marks of it, and if they saw a Resident with less state than his predecessors, nothing would convince them but that he had less power too.'<sup>97</sup> The Resident's professional credibility was thus perceived to hang in the balance; again, the Resident's appearance of grandeur constituted a kind of social capital which, for the Resident's purposes, was of more immediate use than money in the bank.

The Resident's private reputation within the European community was also implicated in these disputes. The Resident's auditors used exceedingly moralising language when contesting expense claims, accusing the Residents, for instance, of 'a spirit of [...] profuse extravagance' and 'a lack of wholesome control', as in Metcalfe's case.<sup>98</sup> The Residents were very sensitive to these allegations, all the more so since rumours of their supposed ostentation sometimes reached their family and friends in Britain. Archibald Seton was especially frustrated by talk of his own prodigality, since it appears to have led his friends and family in Scotland to gravely misconstrue the actual state of his finances, and even to doubt the sincerity of his intention to return home. As Seton put it in a letter to a family friend, 'I cannot sufficiently regret the busy officiousness of ignorant people who, upon this as upon many other occasions, have misled you by fallacious accounts'. Reacting to gossip that he gave away large sums of money, and that his expenses were needlessly great, Seton countered that 'I do not give away money – and for this simple reason, that I have it not to give.' Of his expenses in general, he wrote, 'to call them large, wears almost an appearance of mockery'.<sup>99</sup> Charles Metcalfe likewise urged his sister to ignore 'idle tales' that he had a

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<sup>96</sup> This was acknowledged by the Governor-General-in-Council in a letter to the Court of Directors, 4 Aug. 1809, BC, IOR/F/4/311/7096, OIOC, p. 6.

<sup>97</sup> Henry Russell to N. B. Edmonstone, 31 Aug. 1811, BC, IOR/F/4/372/9248, OIOC, p. 45. A similar point is made in Thomas Sydenham to N.B. Edmonstone, 7 Aug. 1806, BC, IOR/F/4/311/7096, OIOC, p. 14-15.

<sup>98</sup> Extract political letter to Bengal, 30 Sept. 1814, BC, IOR/F/4/552/13387, OIOC, p. 7; Metcalfe interpreted this as a serious attack on his character; see C.T. Metcalfe to John Adam, 23 Jul. 1815, BC, IOR/F/4/552/13387, OIOC, p. 30-31.

<sup>99</sup> Archibald Seton to Henry Steuart, 18 Dec. 1808, Seton Family Papers, IOR Neg 11664, OIOC, np.

hundred horses in his stable. 'I detest wasteful and frivolous expenditure', he assured her, 'and whatever I do, in that way, is from respect to the situation which I hold'.<sup>100</sup> The disputes over monthly expense claims thus carried personal, as well as professional, connotations. Unsurprisingly, then, these disputes created serious rifts between the Residents and the men responsible for auditing them, resentments which always lurked close beneath the surface of the Residents' correspondence.

## Conclusion

While British officials in the late nineteenth century might have dismissed Indian stately ceremonial as empty theatre, this chapter has demonstrated that in the early years of the Residency system imperial administrators were hardly so confident. Archibald Seton, Resident at Delhi, observing the apparently trivial points of ceremony upon which the Mughal Emperor continued to insist in spite of his limited practical authority, wrote cautiously to the Governor-General-in-Council that 'under the cover of the formal homage, which a tenderness for his personal feelings alone prompts us to render him, he seeks to advance a silent and gradual claim to the Substantial attributes of Empire'.<sup>101</sup> The border between political theatre and 'substantial' power was, it seems, extremely difficult to mark out definitively. Residents could not guarantee that their 'substantial' power would be recognized and accepted as such if it were not performed in a visible, recognizable fashion.

This uncertain relationship between power and appearances meant that the upper echelons of the Company could never quite decide how much money Residents should be allowed to spend. In particular, Company officials debated the extent to which the Residents ought to use political gifts to cement their status at court. To be sure, the desire to regulate the Residents' expenditure on this head was to some degree at least informed by pragmatic efforts at retrenchment and the desire to avoid future corruption scandals. Underlying these practical concerns, however, were deeper ideological ambiguities. Members of the political line were aware of the symbolism of gifts and their efficacy at securing relationships both vertically and horizontally. After all, gifts played a similar role in British society, and, even were that not the case, the agency of Indian munshis and ministers meant that British officials could hardly be ignorant of the political importance of these exchanges. Their awareness of the gift's political implications is clearly manifest in their efforts to monitor and regulate such exchanges. The attempt on the part of the Company to impose a rigid, contractual framework

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<sup>100</sup> C.T. Metcalfe to Emily Viscountess Ashbrook, 6 Sept. 1829, Metcalfe Family Papers, Monson Papers, MON 28/B/23/16/19, Lincolnshire Archives, np. Henry Russell was similarly frustrated by accusations of profligacy; see Henry Russell, Notes and drafts of letters on Indian affairs, Russell Papers, MS. Eng. Misc. c. 327, Bodl. Oxf., p. 236.

<sup>101</sup> Extract Political Letter to Bengal, 4 Sept. 1811, BC, IOR/F/4/334/7656, OIOC, p. 19.



on such gift-giving was therefore not a sign of their disregard, but, instead, a betrayal of their anxious desire to set limits to such relationships.

The Residents, however, resented these restraints; a currency of debts and obligations was crucial to their work as mediators and information-gathers. This rift between the Residents and their superiors on the issue of gift-giving was part of a broader, ongoing conflict surrounding the Residents' expense claims. Though partly explicable with reference to opposed interests and institutional structures, at their heart these dissensions were about British ambivalence concerning conspicuous consumption and display, the blurred lines between public and private domains, and differences of opinion regarding the basis of the Company's legitimacy in India. Attitudes within the Company were deeply divided when it came to the desirability of adopting Indian ways of life and styles of rule, particularly when it came to courtly pageantry. The Residents argued for the political necessity of such tactics, but their superiors worried about the effects that these strategies might have on them, the Company's representatives.

Underlying these debates about expenses was a key concern of the Governor-General-in-Council, namely, the Resident's ability to act independently on the political stage, and the different relationships and obligations which might counteract that autonomy. Of these, one relationship loomed large: the Resident's relationship with his state secretary or *mir munshi*. Previous chapters have alluded to the role which the Residents' Indian secretaries played in composing and interpreting letters and advising on questions of gift-exchange and ceremonial, but the following chapter will examine the dynamics of these cross-cultural relationships in greater depth. In so doing, it will consider not only how the Residents sought to manage their ambivalent relationships with the *munshi*, but will also reflect on the practical risks and rewards which these relationships carried for the *munshis* themselves.

## Chapter 4. Weak ties in a tangled web? Relationships between Residents and Residency munshis

In 1805, the Resident at Hyderabad wrote a letter to Acting Governor-General George Hilario Barlow about a munshi. Munshi, a Hindi word meaning scribe or clerk, was a term which Britons commonly applied to their Indian or Persian language tutors, interpreters, and secretaries. The subject of this particular letter was Azizullah, the Hyderabad Residency's long-time head munshi, and the topic was Azizullah's proposed retirement. For more than twelve years, Azizullah had played a crucial role in the Residents' negotiations with the Nizam of Hyderabad and his ministers, so much so that the former Governor-General Marquess Wellesley had awarded the munshi a pay rise and a pension in recognition of his vital work. In 1805, the Acting Resident Henry Russell wrote to inform the Acting Governor-General of the munshi's imminent retirement, and to remind him of Wellesley's promise. Russell also took the opportunity to express his own 'high Estimation of the Character and Talents of Meer Uzeez Oollah.' Based on many years spent working alongside the mir, Russell confirmed that Azizullah had performed important services in the name of the Company, and had, in so doing, earned the respect and admiration of his British superior officers.<sup>1</sup>

Russell's earnest commemoration of Azizullah's services at the twilight of his career speaks to the distinction which Indians sometimes acquired within the political line. Like most Company employees, the Residents were heavily reliant on the work of Indian clerks and scribes to do their job. In recognition of this broad pattern, the role of cultural intermediaries in imperial administration and the construction of colonial knowledge has been a point of enduring interest in the historiography of British imperialism in South Asia. Recent interventions have highlighted the importance of Indian expertise as a basis for British understandings of Indian history, geography, tax-collection, and jurisprudence.<sup>2</sup> Despite this proliferation of scholarship on other branches of the Company's service, however, the munshis' essential contribution to Company diplomacy has continued to be overlooked since

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<sup>1</sup> Henry Russell to George Barlow, 20 Nov. 1805, Papers of Maj-Gen William Kirkpatrick, Mss Eur F 228/51, OIOC, p. 6-7.

<sup>2</sup> Philip B. Wagoner, 'Precolonial intellectuals and the production of colonial knowledge', *CSSH*, 45:4 (2003): 783-814; Dodson, *Orientalism, empire, and national culture*, p. 1; Matthew Edney, *Mapping an empire: The geographical construction of British India, 1765-1843* (Chicago, 1990), p. 25; Kapil Raj, 'Mapping knowledge: Go-betweens in Calcutta, 1770-1820', in *The brokered world: Go-betweens and global intelligence, 1770-1820*, eds. Simon Schaffer et. al. (Sagamore Beach, MA, 2009), p. 122; Hayden Bellenoit, 'Between qanungos and clerks: The cultural and service worlds of Hindustan's pensmen, c. 1750-1850', *MAS*, 48:4 (2014): 872-910; Kapil Raj, 'Refashioning civilities, engineering trust: William Jones, Indian intermediaries and the production of reliable legal knowledge in late eighteenth-century Bengal', *Studies in History*, 17:2 (2001): 175-209.

Michael Fisher first highlighted it as an object of consideration in his general survey of the Residencies, written almost thirty years ago.<sup>3</sup>

Yet, the relationship between Resident and munshi is worth investigating further since it differs in key respects from the cross-cultural working relationships usually described by historians of the Company state. Importantly, Residency munshis operated in predominantly Indian social environments regulated by courtly norms which privileged the munshi's social and cultural capital over that of the Resident. More than a simple translator or informant, the munshi's expertise inhered just as much, if not more, in his internalization of courtly practices and ideals of behaviour, and his ability to perform on the stage of courtly politics. This kind of embodied knowledge was not easily or quickly learned, meaning that the munshi often acted in the Resident's stead, rather than simply furnishing him with the information requisite to do his duty. Munshis in the political line were thus able to acquire status and influence which was arguably unmatched by any other munshi in the Company's employ. At the same time, Residents were senior officials intended to represent the power and authority of the Company at Indian courts; as such, it was important for the Resident to establish and maintain an image of control and incorruptibility. The question of how much responsibility could or should be delegated to the munshi was thus particularly difficult to resolve conclusively in the Residency system, where the issue of public opinion was vested with so much importance (as preceding chapters have illustrated), and the political stakes were perceived to be exceedingly high.

Despite the significant yet contested role of munshis within the Residency system, given the nature of the surviving sources it is difficult to get a clear picture of the relationship between Residents and munshis. One type of source which does survive in relative abundance in Company archives, however, are petitions. These include documents authored by munshis themselves, as well as the letters which Residents wrote on their munshi's behalf. These texts are far from being a transparent reflection of what the munshis thought or felt about their working conditions, nor are they a reliable source for what the relationships between Residents and munshis were like. After all, petitions are instruments for making claims; as such, they were unlikely to contain intimate, unpleasant, or otherwise inconvenient details which did not fit neatly into the narrative constructed by the author for the purposes of securing their objectives (usually a pension). Nevertheless, petitions can be revealing; they allow us not only to track the careers of the munshis in question, but to understand how munshis engaged with the Company and mobilized the Company's networks in pursuit of their interests. By identifying the demands which munshis made on the Company, and the

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<sup>3</sup> Fisher, *Indirect rule in India*, p. 316.

ways in which these demands were explained or justified, we can acquire some insight into how munshis viewed the Company, and what they hoped to gain from it. Equally, by reading the letters which Residents wrote on the munshis' behalf, we learn how far the Residents were willing to draw on their own networks and connections in their munshis' interests. This in turn suggests the kind of leverage which munshis might have exercised over their employers, or the obligations which the Residents believed themselves to owe to their employees. Thus, while many aspects of the munshis' experience are screened from the historian's view, we can nevertheless reconstruct some of the transactions which underpinned and sustained these cross-cultural relationships.

The relationships between Residents and munshis differed according to the personalities, habits, and convictions of the individuals involved. Yet, while there is not a clear, paradigmatic type of Resident-munshi relationship, there are nevertheless patterns which emerge when the major Residencies are considered side by side. The following chapter will identify some of the common features of these relationships as they took shape across the subcontinent against the backdrop of the Company's political expansion. Section 1 will provide basic context by describing who the munshis were and how they were perceived by their British employers. Section 2 will show that despite the censorious language with which munshis were so often described, the Residents' attempts to limit the munshis' role at court were often stymied in practice; in other words, munshis remained crucial to the operations of the Residency despite the protestations of nervous Residents. Having outlined the dynamics which characterized the Resident-munshi relationship, Section 3 will show how this dyadic interaction was shaped by the larger political and corporate culture of which it was a part. Previous studies of go-betweens have emphasized the role they played in shaping intercultural encounters, but the following chapter charts some of the practical consequences that followed from this intermediary position, particularly where the forces of bureaucratic authority and personal obligation collided.

## **1. Stereotypes and suspicions**

Residency munshis were part of a broad corps of clerks and writers who made their living through 'mastery of the pen'.<sup>4</sup> Some sold their services in the bazaar, others worked for commercial firms or individual notables. The greatest prestige was attached to royal munshis, state secretaries operating at the highest level of politics.<sup>5</sup> Munshis came to their work largely by way of family precedents, deploying networks of friends and kin to learn the craft and find

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<sup>4</sup> Bayly, *Empire and information*, p. 74.

<sup>5</sup> Ibid.

employment. Entry and advancement depended on skills and connections rather than formal qualifications.<sup>6</sup> A munshi's skillset generally included penmanship and accountancy, as well as an in-depth knowledge of social etiquette, political norms, and literary conventions.<sup>7</sup> The East India Company's Residents employed a number of munshis to perform a range of administrative tasks, but most important was the head munshi or mir munshi, the Resident's personal agent. Mir munshis generally came from good families, and were for the most part, though not always, Muslim.<sup>8</sup> While some were of local provenance, their families already established within the administrative world of the court, many mir munshis acquired the position because of their personal connection to the Resident in office or his network of friends and kin.<sup>9</sup> Practices varied from Resident to Resident, but in addition to overseeing the Residency's Indian staff, the head munshi usually met with ministers and other notables on the Resident's behalf.

Included among the voluminous papers of the major Residencies are a number of reports, authored by munshis, detailing their meetings with rulers and ministers. The Residents' own everyday working relationship with their munshis, however, often went undocumented. The Resident and munshi met in person to discuss points of policy, and these conversations were only occasionally recorded in writing. When corresponding with the Governor-General-in-Council in Calcutta or their families in Britain, Residents conventionally passed over the mechanics of the Residency, including the activities of its Indian staff. When taken to task by his mother for failing to adequately describe his 'habits and life', Alexander Fraser, secretary to the Resident at Delhi, explained that such elisions were only to be expected in letters from Indian officials, 'since the history of his life is a mere routine of business, whose nature is nearly unknown in Europe; or whose variety & complication renders it difficult to describe.'<sup>10</sup> Kate Teltscher has described the familiar letter as a stage for dramatizing the colonial self, 'a form of performance where the letter-writer stages the encounter between cultures, locations, and peoples', but it is for precisely this reason that many of the more complicated or banal elements of the Residents' day-to-day life were elided; they simply did not make for easy or compelling reading.<sup>11</sup> As a result of these

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<sup>6</sup> J.F. Richards, 'Norms of comportment among imperial Mughal officers', in *Moral conduct and authority: The place of adab in South Asian Islam*, ed. Barbara Daly Metcalf (Berkeley, CA, 1984), p. 256.

<sup>7</sup> Rajeev Kinra, 'Master and munshi: A brahman secretary's guide to Mughal governance', *IESHR*, 47:4 (2010): 530.

<sup>8</sup> Fisher, *Indirect rule in India*, p. 321.

<sup>9</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 332.

<sup>10</sup> Alexander Fraser to his mother, 20 Aug. 1810, Fraser of Reelig Papers, vol. 33, NRAS, p. 208.

<sup>11</sup> Kate Teltscher, 'Writing home and crossing cultures: George Bogle in Bengal and Tibet, 1770-1775', in Kathleen Wilson, ed., *A new imperial history: Culture, identity, and modernity in Britain and the empire, 1660-1840* (Cambridge, 2004), p. 282.

kinds of epistolary conventions, even some of the more distinguished or notorious munshis make only sporadic appearances in the sources, occasionally disappearing from view entirely. In consequence, certain aspects of these relationships have proven elusive to the historian, particularly how they were viewed and experienced by munshis themselves.

When reflecting on why munshis might have attached themselves to British Residents, it seems logical to assume that their trajectory was at least partly shaped by their history. Most analyses of human agency, while recognizing the importance of emergent events, nevertheless stress the ‘conditioning quality’ of the past.<sup>12</sup> When confronting new situations, we generally draw, albeit creatively, on previous experiences and pre-existing repertoires. Munshis appear to have reacted in a similar fashion as the Company emerged as a major political player in the Indian subcontinent. At Indian royal capitals, there was a long historical precedent of service gentry seeking patronage from the local representatives of rival Indian powers.<sup>13</sup> C.A. Bayly has argued that Indians in the eighteenth century had a strong sense of attachment to particular homelands, customs, or political and religious institutions, which he terms ‘old patriotism,’ but he made some exception for the munshis who depended for their livelihood on elite patrons.<sup>14</sup> Many munshis were itinerant, moving from the land of their birth to regional cultural capitals in pursuit of learning or employment opportunities.<sup>15</sup> Their identity was tied up in particular forms of expertise and family traditions of service to the state.<sup>16</sup> As historians of early modern India have observed, this scribal elite had long been flexible and diverse, bridging regional Brahmanical traditions and a wider Indo-Islamic culture; they were accustomed to negotiating religious and cultural difference.<sup>17</sup> Accordingly, when munshis found employment with the Company, they were adjusting to changing circumstances, but there was some continuity in the nature of their employment.

There is even reason to think that munshis and Residents might have had broadly similar impressions of the reciprocal services to be expected from such a relationship. In India, relationships between elite patrons and their munshis could be powerful and long-

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<sup>12</sup> Mustafa Emirbayer and Ann Mische, ‘What is agency?’, *American Journal of Sociology*, 103 (1998): 975.

<sup>13</sup> Karen Leonard, *Social history of an Indian caste: The Kayasths of Hyderabad* (Berkeley, CA, 1978), p. 22.

<sup>14</sup> C. A. Bayly, *Origins of nationality in South Asia: Patriotism and ethical government in the making of modern India* (Oxford, 1998), p. 4.

<sup>15</sup> Maria Szuppe, ‘Circulation des lettrés et cercles littéraires: Entre Asie Centrale, Iran et Inde du Nord (xve-xviiiie siècle)’, *Annales. histoire, sciences sociales*, 59 (2004): 997–1018.

<sup>16</sup> Kumkum Chatterjee, ‘History as self-representation: The recasting of a political tradition in late eighteenth-century eastern India’, *MAS*, 32:4 (1998): 931.

<sup>17</sup> Kumkum Chatterjee, ‘Scribal elites in Sultanate and Mughal Bengal’, *IESHR*, 47:4 (2010): 463; Muzaffar Alam and Sanjay Subrahmanyam, ‘The making of a munshi’, *CSSAAME*, 24:2 (2003): 71.

lasting, almost resembling a family connection.<sup>18</sup> Similarly, Naomi Tadmor has illustrated how in the British context membership of the 'household-family' was flexible and capacious, encompassing servants, apprentices, and other dependants.<sup>19</sup> The servant's recognized place within the patriarchal household meant that the household head had a responsibility towards him or her.<sup>20</sup> In line with these prescriptions, Residents acknowledged a certain accountability for their munshi's welfare, even after the working relationship had ended. Henry Russell, for instance, found a post for his former munshi (who he called 'Munshi Bankir') at Hyderabad upon that munshi's request. 'He has Claims upon me,' Russell explained, 'from having been my first moonshy at Hyderabad; and I will cheerfully do for him every thing that I can with Propriety.'<sup>21</sup> Richard Jenkins likewise appealed to a Company official at Bareilly on behalf of a former munshi Ghulam Hussein, for, in his words, 'notwithstanding the unfortunate circumstances under which I parted with Gholaum Hoosseine, I am still as solicitous as ever to serve him.'<sup>22</sup> This vertical relationship of mutual obligation approximated the connection that the munshi would have historically shared with Indian patrons.<sup>23</sup> Historians have been inclined to draw stark distinctions between the modern, bureaucratic Company and a more patrimonial Indian political culture, but in both British and Indian society, vertical relationships of service and obligation like this were an integral part of the texture of social and political life.<sup>24</sup>

Still, there were no doubt disjunctions, aspects of the munshis' experiences in the Company's service which were shaped by the particular beliefs and assumptions of their British employers. Prominent among these was the distrust with which British officials tended to regard munshis as a group. Tellingly, although Resident John Munro strenuously denied the charges of corruption levelled at him by the inhabitants of Travancore, where he was stationed, he was far less enthusiastic in defending the good name of his munshi, Reddy Rao. While Munro's investigation into Reddy Rao's conduct produced no evidence of wrongdoing, Munro concluded that 'however high my opinion of Reddy Rows integrity may be, yet, it is impossible that I can positively affirm that his conduct, or that of any other native servant has

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<sup>18</sup> Alam and Subrahmanyam, 'The making of a munshi', p. 65.

<sup>19</sup> Tadmor, *Family and friends*, p. 19.

<sup>20</sup> Cissie Fairchild, *Domestic enemies: Servants & their masters in old regime France* (Baltimore, MD, 1984), p. 139.

<sup>21</sup> Henry Russell to Charles Russell, 4 Jun. 1810, Russell Papers, MSS Eng. lett. d. 151, Bodl. Oxf, p. 101.

<sup>22</sup> Richard Jenkins to J. Brooke, 21 Jul. 1811, Letter books of Sir Richard Jenkins, Mss Eur E111, OIOC, p. 149.

<sup>23</sup> Alam and Subrahmanyam, 'The making of a munshi', p. 65.

<sup>24</sup> For the first point, see for example Dirks, *The hollow crown*, p. 354; for patronage in Indian and British society, respectively, see Leonard, *Social history of an Indian caste*, p. 22; Perkin, *The origins of modern English society*, p. 44.

invariably been pure and honorable.’<sup>25</sup> From John Munro’s perspective, Reddy Rao’s status as a native servant meant that his probity could not be vouchsafed. Though Residents sometimes ascribed positive traits to specific munshis in this way, they almost always described munshis in general using negative, highly stereotyped language.<sup>26</sup> The underlying foundations of this prejudice are difficult to disentangle. In part this indeterminacy is a product of the sources; Residents often repeated these stereotypes, but rarely reflected on them at length. The influence of nascent biological conceptions of ‘race’ is not readily apparent, though it is possible that Residents were simply unwilling to enter into explicit discussions of racial ideologies or racist practices in their letters to professional colleagues, and rarely discussed these relationships at all when writing to family.

Of more obvious significance were contemporary attitudes towards Indian political culture; to some extent, the Residents’ attitudes towards their munshi seem to have been informed by a more generalised set of British preconceptions. The gist of these stereotypes is evident in a passage from John Blakiston’s published memoirs of his military service in India, where Blakiston writes that a unique feature of Indian society was ‘their policy to withhold every fact they possess, even though it cost them nothing to give it; and to deceive you by every means in their power, even when they can themselves derive no apparent benefit from so doing.’<sup>27</sup> Alena K. Alamgir has identified a long-term continuity in the language of mistrust with which Britons described their relationships with Indians; in the personal papers of the Residents, Indian courtly politics were certainly characterized in terms that resonated with this convention.<sup>28</sup> The long-time Resident at Poona Sir Charles Malet (Resident 1793 to 1798) compared the position of the Company in India to ‘that of an honest Man thrown by Circumstances into the society of Swindlers [...] & Highwaymen.’<sup>29</sup> In line with this general view of Indian politics, Residents often described their munshis’ activities as crafty or conniving. Henry Russell claimed to have been obliged to expel his munshi from the Residency at Poona for ‘intriguing,’ as he put it, commenting that ‘there is something in the air of Poona which is not only villainous itself, but is also the Cause of Villainy in others.’<sup>30</sup>

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<sup>25</sup> John Munro, ‘Observations on a petition delivered to the Government dated 16 September 1813’, BC, IOR/F/4/445/10674, OIOC, p. 97.

<sup>26</sup> This is characteristic of representations of out-groups. See Mark Knights, ‘Historical stereotypes and histories of stereotypes’, in *Psychology and history: interdisciplinary explorations*, eds. Christian Tileagă and Jovan Byford (Cambridge, 2014), p. 246.

<sup>27</sup> Blakiston, *Twelve years military adventure*, p. 107.

<sup>28</sup> Alena K. Alamgir, ‘“The learned brahmen, who assists me”: Changing colonial relationships in 18<sup>th</sup> and 19<sup>th</sup> century India’, *Journal of Historical Sociology*, 19:4 (2006): 426.

<sup>29</sup> C.W. Malet to G.F. Cherry, Diaries and Papers of Sir Charles Malet, Mss Eur F149/56, OIOC, p. 167.

<sup>30</sup> Henry Russell to Charles Russell, 18 Dec. 1810, Russell Papers, MSS. Eng. lett. d. 152, Bodl. Oxf., p. 63.



Another potential factor explaining the Residents' distrust of munshis more specifically could be socioeconomic difference. Imperial historians have long remarked the similarities between the language of race and class. Ann Stoler has theorized that racial and class language were not only parallels of one another, but were in fact overlapping and interchangeable ways of constructing and explaining what contemporaries considered to be similar kinds of human differences, to do with variant attitudes and behaviours.<sup>31</sup> Munshis, it is true, were recognized by Britons to form a hereditary class of respected and highly trained service gentry; Susan Bayly has shown how these specialists emerged as a prestigious and prominent class of people in the eighteenth century as the proliferating Mughal successor states competed for administrative expertise and royal legitimacy.<sup>32</sup> Moreover, Residents purposefully chose, as much as possible, munshis of good family and reputation, believing that this would increase the munshi's credit in the eyes of the courtly elite, as well as acting as a form of insurance for the munshi's good behaviour.<sup>33</sup> Still, in his pamphlet directed at members of the political line John Malcolm highlighted the class of the munshi as an object of consideration when he warned his readers from investing them with too much power or favour, contending that Indian servants 'cannot be supposed to have even the same motives with those of native rulers for good conduct, much less the same title to regard.'<sup>34</sup> Munshis were still subordinate figures who were not always trusted to act according to the same principles as their aristocratic British employers. Tellingly, when writing to the secretary to government about his Residency expenses, Henry Russell refused to reduce the wages of his head munshi on the grounds that 'it is vain to expect honesty from any Native Servant, who is not placed beyond the reach of ordinary Temptation.'<sup>35</sup>

Munshis were also routinely accused of immoral behaviour by their British employers, mirroring language used to describe the lower social orders in Europe.<sup>36</sup> In the words of Thomas Williamson, munshis, 'having only to attend their employers at stated hours, and the residue of their time being wholly unoccupied, it is not to be wondered, that, with their liberal salaries, they should rather court, than shun, pleasure.' Williamson elaborated that 'what with venery, drinking, smoking, &c. nine in ten of them exhale the most

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<sup>31</sup> Ann Laura Stoler, *Race and the education of desire: Foucault's history of sexuality and the colonial order of things* (Durham, NC, 1995), p. 127.

<sup>32</sup> Bayly, *Caste, society and politics in India*, p. 66; see also Richards, 'The formulation of imperial authority under Akbar and Jahangir', p. 311.

<sup>33</sup> Fisher, *Indirect rule in India*, p. 321

<sup>34</sup> Malcolm, 'Notes of instruction,' in Briggs, *Letters*, p. 203.

<sup>35</sup> Henry Russell to John Adam, 5 Sept. 1816, Notes and intelligence of Mountstuart Elphinstone regarding the Peshwa and Trimbuckjee, Elphinstone Collection, Mss Eur F88/60, OIOC, p. 149.

<sup>36</sup> R.C. Richardson, *Household servants in early modern England* (Manchester, 2010), p. 175.

intolerable effluvia!’<sup>37</sup> This complaint features prominently in the correspondence of Resident Mountstuart Elphinstone while at Nagpur, who grumbled to his friend John Adam that he was ‘very ill off for natives,’ having ‘a Moonshee who is drunk half the day & an intelligencer who is drunk the whole day.’ To give substance to his grievances, Elphinstone recounted how when he sent his munshi to wait on the Raja ‘he [the munshi] was so drunk that he could not stand, was taken sick during the interview & fell off his horse on the way home.’<sup>38</sup> These allegations, though they echo the rhetoric surrounding the lower social orders more broadly, also resemble the discourse of a supposed ‘servant problem’ in England. Elphinstone’s complaints call to mind the prevalence within British court records and family papers of dysfunctional relationships between masters and servants in which servants are ceaselessly charged with vice, cheating, idleness and drunkenness.<sup>39</sup>

This resemblance suggests that a parallel can be drawn between the distrust with which the Resident viewed his munshi and the distrust with which masters sometimes regarded their servants in Europe and the colonies. In both cases, intimacy with a stranger and a member of a different social order could be viewed as potentially threatening.<sup>40</sup> Elphinstone, at least, made his views on the status of the munshi as a dangerous interloper quite clear when he assured Lady Hood, in a personal letter, ‘that no native of Asia can be admitted to table without his interrupting the comfort of the Company on which he is a spy & that above all no Persian servant of any rank can be allowed such a distinction without its tempting him to encroach.’<sup>41</sup> For Elphinstone, the munshi’s background and his rank together marked him out as an outsider to be kept at a distance. John Briggs, in a letter of advice to a young man just entering the civil line of the Company, similarly reminded his correspondents to be wary when setting up a household, for ‘[s]ervants in all countries have it greatly in their power to contribute to our comforts as well as to impose on us, and even sometimes to inflict on us positive distress,’ but that ‘this must be particularly the case in a strange land like this.’<sup>42</sup> Munshis were not domestic servants, but their association with the Resident was also close, perhaps troublingly so. John Malcolm warned his readers that an Indian employee’s ‘real or supposed influence will, under any circumstances that they are allowed frequent approach to an European officer in the exercise of authority, give them opportunities of abusing his confidence if they desire it,’ contending that ‘there is no science at which the

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<sup>37</sup> Williamson, *East India Vade-Mecum*, vol. I, p. 194.

<sup>38</sup> Mountstuart Elphinstone to John Adam, 3 May 1804, Papers of John Adam, Mss Eur F109/88, OIOC, n.p.

<sup>39</sup> Richardson, *Household servants*, p. 176.

<sup>40</sup> Fairchilds, *Domestic enemies*, p. 154-155.

<sup>41</sup> Mountstuart Elphinstone to Lady Hood, 26 May 1813, Seaforth Papers, GD46/17/42, NRS, n.p.

<sup>42</sup> Briggs, *Letters*, p. 11.

more artful among the natives are greater adepts, than that of turning to account the real or supposed confidence of their superiors.<sup>43</sup> It seems possible that the munshi's status as a non-European, as well as his role as an employee with intimate access to the details of the Resident's professional life, might have combined to make him doubly threatening from the Resident's perspective.

The munshi's close association with the Resident, and his access to the Residency papers, did mean that he had it in his power to throw relations between the Company and the court into disarray. To some extent, the munshi's personal connection to the Resident allowed him to partake of the Resident's public authority, muddying hierarchies of power which the Resident would have preferred to keep clear-cut. There are a few examples of munshis extorting money from courtly figures with promises of bringing their influence to bear on the Resident, but none perhaps is more extraordinary than the case of Muhammad Saddick Khan, or illustrates so well the extreme possibility that munshis could infiltrate the Residency and use its authority for their own purposes.<sup>44</sup> In the year 1809, the Governor-General received a mysterious letter from Shahamat Khan, second brother to the Nawab Vizier of Awadh, alluding vaguely to promises made to him by the recently deceased Resident John Collins. Further investigation by the newly appointed Resident John Baillie unearthed a plot orchestrated by a deputy munshi in Collins' office. The munshi, it transpired, had forged letters purporting to be from John Collins and the Governor General, in which he promised to oust the current Nawab Vizier and to place Shahamat Khan on the throne in his place. The use of the Resident's official seal, combined with the munshi's status as representative of the Resident, appear to have convinced Shahamat Khan of the legitimacy of the plan, allowing the munshi to use the proposed coup d'état as a pretext for extorting large sums of money. The Resident's exposure of the plot, and Shahamat Khan's subsequent exile to Company-ruled Patna, marked the end of the conspiracy.<sup>45</sup> At the same time, this exceptional occurrence forcefully illustrates the subversive potential of the munshi, no doubt explaining why some Residents regarded their munshis with wariness, even though for the most part their fears of malfeasance never seem to have materialised. The very possibility of such a misappropriation of Company authority was a source of anxiety, however baseless such anxieties might have

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<sup>43</sup> Malcolm, 'Notes of instruction', in Briggs, *Letters*, p. 203; 206-207.

<sup>44</sup> See Extract Political Letter from Bengal, 9 May 1810, BC, IOR/F/4/311/7620, OIOC, p. 2-4 for example of 'Syud Ruzzee Khan,' dismissed for corrupt practises; for similar accusations of Elphinstone's agent at Poona see also 5 Jan. 1817 and 8 Feb. 1817, Notes and intelligence of Mountstuart Elphinstone regarding the Peshawar and Trimbuckjee, Elphinstone Collection, Mss Eur F88/60, OIOC, np.

<sup>45</sup> See Extract Political Letter from Bengal, 2 Feb. 1808, BC, IOR/F/4/248/5584, OIOC, p. 1-22 for a description of this series of events.

been in practice given that these acts of corruption seem to have been a relative rarity, or at least were rarely exposed.

This brings us to perhaps the clearest source of British anxieties about the munshi, namely, his role as middleman and translator. Munshis were regularly responsible for reading out, translating and explaining communications of Company policy to the ruler and his ministers, thereby giving the munshi a role in shaping relationships and negotiations between the Indian state and the Company.<sup>46</sup> Given this position of influence, Residents and their superiors greatly feared being misled or misrepresented by munshis. This anxiety was not unique to Residents, but applied in more or less equal measure to most officials in Company employ. Throughout India, the Company was dependent on the mediation of clerks, money-changers, bankers and commercial middlemen.<sup>47</sup> Accordingly, the problem of translation and interpretation, and the danger of misrepresentation, was at the forefront of every Company employee's consciousness. In his *Vade Mecum*, a popular guide for young men about to enter the Company's service, Thomas Williamson vehemently urged his readers to familiarize themselves with the Indian languages, for until they were able to dispense with an interpreter on ordinary occasions, 'no person can be deemed independent; far less, capable of acting in any civil, military, or commercial capacity, with effect.'<sup>48</sup> Munshis, then, were the subject of many of the same anxieties which have historically coalesced around the figure of the translator.<sup>49</sup> It was a fear which sprung from munshis' relative power, as well as their perceived cultural and socioeconomic 'otherness.' What made the relationship particularly fraught was the disruption of clear lines of authority within the Residency; it was always possible that the munshi might act in the Resident's stead to pursue his own interests or inclinations, perhaps without the Resident even realizing it.

At the heart of these various stereotypes about munshis, then, were the Residents' anxieties about their own incapacity, and the fear that the munshi might take advantage of it. The question, from the Company's perspective, was how the Resident could ensure that the munshi did not use this power to frustrate or impede the Residency's operations. As Kapil Raj

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<sup>46</sup> For descriptions of *munshi's* role as translator and interpreter, see Thomas Sydenham to Earl Minto, 30 Aug. 1809, Hyderabad Residency Records, box no. 2, vol. 38, NAI, p. 12, or Richard Jenkins to Marquess of Hastings, 17 Jul. 1814, in *Nagpur records*, vol. III, p. 487.

<sup>47</sup> Lakshmi Subramanian, 'Banias and the British: The role of indigenous credit in the process of imperial expansion in Western India in the second half of the eighteenth century', *MAS*, 21:3 (1987): 473-510.

<sup>48</sup> Williamson, *East India Vade-Mecum*, vol. I, p. 172.

<sup>49</sup> For North American context see James H. Merrell, *Into the American woods: Negotiators on the Pennsylvania frontier* (New York, NY, 1999), p. 32. For African context, see Benjamin N. Lawrance, Emily Lynn Osborn, and Richard L. Roberts (eds.), *Intermediaries, interpreters, and clerks: African employees in the making of colonial Africa* (Madison, WI, 2006), p. 11.

has illustrated, this problem of intercultural trust was a primary concern for Company administrators reliant on the skill and expertise of Indian agents.<sup>50</sup> Under pressure from the Governor-General-in-Council in Calcutta, Residents accordingly devised strategies to manage the perceived risks represented by the munshi. As Henry Russell advised his brother, ‘without searching for perfect Instruments, which are not to be found, we must be content to make the best use we can of those which Circumstances have placed within our reach.’<sup>51</sup> Yet, the question of what constituted ‘the best use’ for Residency munshis remained a conundrum, and most Residents found it difficult to displace the munshi from his position of influence, as the following section will illustrate.

## 2. The dialectic of control

The clearest means of mitigating the munshi’s power was by learning Indian languages. Even William Jones, perhaps the most famous Orientalist of the eighteenth century, was motivated to learn Sanskrit primarily as a means of more closely monitoring the Indian officials who assisted him in his work at the Supreme Court in Calcutta.<sup>52</sup> The Company’s administration similarly sought to preclude a dependence on Indian interpreters by placing a deliberate emphasis on language skills. This prioritization of languages applied particularly to aspiring members of the political line, but to some extent British officials of all kinds were expected to be conversant in the Indian languages relevant to their post. During the late eighteenth century Persian and Hindustani language instruction was gradually institutionalized in the form of grammars and dictionaries, treatises, translations and class books directed to native English speakers. In the early nineteenth century, the Company founded colleges at Fort William (in 1800) and Haileybury (in 1806) where students were also instructed in Arabic and Bengali.<sup>53</sup> By 1828, Company official John Briggs proclaimed proudly and in print that ‘hardly an instance now exists of any European holding a civil situation of responsibility removed from the presidencies, who is ignorant of the language of the district in which he resides.’<sup>54</sup>

To be sure, Residents were hardly as well-versed in Indian languages as their munshis. Residents stationed at Maratha courts appear to have spoken little or no Marathi, notwithstanding that some of the Maratha rulers, notably the Raja of Nagpur, were reticent

<sup>50</sup> Raj, ‘Refashioning civilities, engineering trust’, p. 175-209.

<sup>51</sup> Henry Russell to Charles Russell, 10 Jun. 1810, Russell Papers, MSS Eng. lett. D. 151, Bodl. Oxf., p. 119.

<sup>52</sup> Rosane Rocher, ‘Weaving knowledge: Sir William Jones and Indian pundits’, in *Objects of enquiry: The life contributions and influences of Sir William Jones (1746-1794)*, eds. Garland Cannon and Kevin R. Brine (New York, NY, 1995), p. 54.

<sup>53</sup> Cohn, *Colonialism and its forms of knowledge*, p. 21.

<sup>54</sup> Briggs, *Letters*, p. 6.

about discussing politics in anything other than their native tongue.<sup>55</sup> Even at royal centres where the dominant languages were Persian and Hindustani, Residents were still discouraged from acting independently of their munshis in their dealings with the court. Significantly, even John Baillie, previously a professor of Persian at the Company's college in Calcutta, was scolded by Governor-General Marquess Hastings for assuming that he was sufficiently versed in Persian to dispense with a munshi in his meetings with the Nawab Vizier and his ministers. As Hastings put it, 'the reliance of Major Baillie on his correct possession of a polished idiom was likely to betray him beyond the exact line of established usage.'<sup>56</sup> However fluent the Residents were by European standards, their linguistic abilities were not expected to rival the eloquence and refinement of trained and experienced munshis. In a context where an individual's grasp of Persian was a point of personal prestige, minute idiomatic details mattered; as historian Muzaffar Alam phrased it, 'deficiency in elegant self-expression meant cultural failure'.<sup>57</sup>

Nevertheless, Residents were still proficient enough to intervene, to some extent, when they felt they were being misrepresented by their translators. While H. T. Colebrooke was in the process of negotiating a treaty of defensive alliance with the Rajah of Nagpur through the mediation of his munshi, he noticed that the munshi had omitted the word 'quadruple' in his description of the proposed alliance, presenting it to the Rajah as an alliance between the two states exclusively rather than a joint alliance with the Company, the Peshwa of Poona, and the Nizam of Hyderabad; Colebrooke subsequently corrected the mistake.<sup>58</sup> Similarly, John Collins carefully attended to the munshi Kaval Nain's translation of the Treaty of Bassein to the Maratha chieftain Daulat Rao Sindhia. In his papers, Collins noted that 'when the moonshee came to the 12<sup>th</sup> Article [...] he by no means gave that force to the words thereof which he ought to have done, I was, therefore, under the necessity of assisting him, & embraced the occasion of giving the clearest explanation of that important stipulation.'<sup>59</sup> Residents sought, as much as possible, to monitor and control the way in which Company policy was represented to Indian rulers and ministers via the channel of the munshi, even taking over entirely when the munshi was considered to have misspoken.

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<sup>55</sup> H.T. Colebrooke to Marquess Wellesley, 26 Mar. 1799, in *Nagpur records*, vol. I, p. 108.

<sup>56</sup> Removal of Lieut. Col. Baillie from Lucknow, BC, IOR/F/4/510/12267, OIOC, p. 17.

<sup>57</sup> Muzaffar Alam, 'The culture and politics of Persian in precolonial Hindustan', in *Literary cultures in history: reconstructions from South Asia*, ed. Sheldon Pollock (Berkeley, CA, 2003), p. 167.

<sup>58</sup> H.T. Colebrooke to Marquess Wellesley, 19 Apr. 1799, Memoir of the origin and descent of the Bhooslah family, Wellesley Papers, Add MS 13589, BL, p. 1.

<sup>59</sup> John Collins to Marquess Wellesley, 29 May 1803, Copies of letters and dispatches of Col. John Collins, Papers of Maj-Gen William Kirkpatrick, Mss Eur F228/77, OIOC, p. 8.

The problem, from the Residents' perspective, was that in order to achieve their political ends it was not enough to be linguistically competent. Indian courtly politics were governed by a larger Indo-Persian system of meanings, a dense web of moral, ethical, and administrative ideals. The munshi was extensively trained in these Indo-Persian principles, and therefore better able to frame and present the Resident's demands or queries. These scribal elite were widely read from a young age in poetry, politics, ethics, history, and epistolography.<sup>60</sup> Contemporaries outside of the diplomatic line sometimes belittled this kind of expertise. Captain Thomas Williamson, a soldier, scoffed that 'a few volumes of tales, the lives of those great men who have either invaded, or ruled, the empire, some moral tracts, and the Koran [...] constitute the acquirements of this haughty class of servants.'<sup>61</sup> Those in the political departments, however, clearly recognized the munshi's worth. For instance, the Persian *insha* tradition of *belles lettres* comprised a complex blend of formula and invention, producing documents with a poetic bent 'heavily imbued with rhymed prose, verse, figurative language, and rhetorical embellishment,' to quote historian Colin Mitchell.<sup>62</sup> The Resident's working knowledge of Persian hardly sufficed for the composition of the highly stylized prose requisite for corresponding officially with the Indian elite.<sup>63</sup>

There was also etiquette to consider. As Dick Kooiman demonstrated in his study of the Residencies in the later nineteenth century, ceremonial and questions of precedence were taken very seriously as reflections of the status and prestige of those concerned.<sup>64</sup> A munshi could be an invaluable resource in this regard, as even the most grudging Residents were ultimately forced to acknowledge.<sup>65</sup> The munshi was of vital assistance in determining questions of protocol when arranging meetings between the Resident and other figures of political importance, avoiding offence or indignity on either side.<sup>66</sup> All in all, the munshi had the cultural capital so crucial to the success of the Resident's diplomatic endeavours. It was a particular kind of know-how which, having been painstakingly acquired over the course of the munshi's lifetime, was not easily transmitted to British officials.<sup>67</sup>

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<sup>60</sup> Alam and Subrahmanyam, 'The making of a munshi', p. 63; see also Chatterjee, 'Scribal elites in Sultanate and Mughal Bengal', p. 462.

<sup>61</sup> Williamson, *East India Vade Mecum*, p. 192-193.

<sup>62</sup> Mitchell, 'Safavid imperial *tarassul* and the Persian *insha* tradition', p. 182; for the importance of poetry in the *insha* tradition, see p. 200-201.

<sup>63</sup> Fisher, *Indirect rule in India*, p. 319.

<sup>64</sup> Kooiman, 'Meeting at the threshold', p. 311-333.

<sup>65</sup> Mountstuart Elphinstone to John Adam, 3 May 1804, Papers of John Adam, Mss Eur F109/88, OIOC, n.p.

<sup>66</sup> For example, see description of a *munshi* arranging the first meeting between the new Resident at Nagpur and the Rajah in Mountstuart Elphinstone to Marquess Wellesley, 1 Jan. 1804, in *Nagpur records*, vol. 1, p. 17.

<sup>67</sup> Pierre Bourdieu, 'The forms of capital', in *Readings in economic sociology*, ed. Nicole Woolsey (Malden, MA, 2002), p. 283.

As a result of this *savoir-faire*, the munshi was often better equipped than the Resident to negotiate sensitive diplomatic situations. Indian rulers and their ministers were sometimes willing to extend a degree of trust to the munshi which they withheld from the Resident, and this trust could be taken advantage of by the Resident if he was willing to use a munshi as his agent. When Richard Strachey (then Resident at Lucknow) was having trouble reaching an agreement with the Vizier, he dispatched his munshi to initiate a second round of negotiations. The Vizier expressed his willingness to draft a written engagement, and asked the munshi to assist in formulating that treaty. The munshi reported this conversation to Strachey, at which point Strachey himself drafted a treaty, which ‘was submitted to the Vizier by the moonshee as if from himself.’<sup>68</sup> In this case, Strachey clearly felt that, by presenting the draft as the munshi’s own work, the Vizier would be more likely to accept the treaty as a reflection of his own best interests. The most effective munshis were often individuals who were able to elicit the Indian ruler’s trust in this way, creating the sense that they were serving both parties at the same time. Azizullah, for instance, was said (according to a letter penned by the first minister of the Nizam of Hyderabad) to have shown ‘sincere attachment to the Interests of both States,’ and to have acted always ‘with due regard and consideration towards the ministers of his Highness.’<sup>69</sup>

Although Residents could profit by employing munshis in this fashion, this intermediary role also clearly invested the munshi with precisely the kind of influence which the Resident sought to monopolize for himself. Accordingly, some Residents vacillated when it came to relying on the munshi in this way. Early on in his career at Poona, Mountstuart Elphinstone found that the intercession of a munshi could help smooth over disputes; as Elphinstone put it, ‘when transacting business with me on such occasions, they [the ruler and his ministers] are so intent on resisting my proposals and on guarding against committing themselves, that a great deal of the effect of all arguments and explanations is lost.’ Rather than attending on the minister himself, then, Elphinstone preferred to send his munshi.<sup>70</sup> Later, however, Elphinstone appears to have second-guessed his inclination to confide in the munshi so readily. In a letter of 1814, Elphinstone reported that though Cursetji Sait had proved very useful in past negotiations with the Peshwa, he (Elphinstone) no longer thought it expedient to use Cursetji Sait as a channel for communication with the court. As Elphinstone put it, the Peshwa’s favour well as Cursetji Sait’s position as agent of the British Residency had ‘given the natives an exaggerated idea of his consequence.’ This led Elphinstone to

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<sup>68</sup> Richard Strachey to John Adam, 29 Apr. 1816, Richard Strachey Papers, Mss Eur D514/3, pp. 116.

<sup>69</sup> Mir Alam to Thomas Sydenham, 8 Jan. 1806, Foreign Secret Department Records, file no. 66-8, NAI, p. 6.

<sup>70</sup> Mountstuart Elphinstone to Lord Minto, 7 Jul. 1812, in *Poona records*, vol. XII, p. 183.



‘discontinue employing him to the extent which had been usual.’ Once again, the spectre of undue influence made the Resident unwilling to place too much trust in an individual whom he nevertheless continued to recognize as ‘zealous and useful.’<sup>71</sup>

Still, by sidestepping his munshi Elphinstone might have imperiled his own professional agenda, at least according to Gangadhar Shastri, emissary of the Gaikwar (a rival Maratha power). In 1814 Elphinstone was in the process of mediating between the Gaikwar and the Peshwa on the subject of an expired lease. In May of that year, with no end to the negotiations in sight, the Shastri approached Elphinstone with a suggestion, namely, that the Residency’s head servant Cursetji should be more closely involved in the mediation process. According to Elphinstone’s account of the conversation, the Shastri ‘said he observed that the Sait was not in my confidence, that a disaffected servant was worse than an enemy.’ When asked to elaborate further, the Shastri replied ‘that the Sait possessed great influence with the Peshwa, and would be tempted to employ it in thwarting our views.’<sup>72</sup> Though ultimately the Shastri’s suggestions do not seem to have shaken Elphinstone’s determination to sideline the Sait, they nevertheless imply the potential dangers of bypassing a munshi. Not only was the Resident perhaps needlessly prolonging negotiations, he might even have been actively though unintentionally sabotaging his own plans by sowing resentments.

Circumventing a munshi might have had its risks, but many Residents certainly shared Elphinstone’s desire to discharge the munshi entirely. Given the demands of Residency business, however, these aspirations rarely translated into practice. Barry Close and Thomas Sydenham both began their Residencies by vowing to meet directly with the minister on all points of material interest. Close argued that this observance would ‘prevent misconceptions and give precision to the delivery of our sentiments,’ while Sydenham averred that ‘at present it is often very uncertain whether the representations made to the Minister by the British Resident be faithfully conveyed to the Peshwa, and that uncertainty would be increased by the mediation of another agent between His Highness and the Resident.’<sup>73</sup> With time, however, their resolve weakened. Henry Russell, who worked under both Thomas Sydenham and Barry Close as Assistant Resident and Acting Resident, respectively, remarked that neither man successfully made their ambitions a reality. According to Russell, ‘they both of them began their Administrations with a decided Resolution to conduct their Business without the Agency of a moonshy: and yet, perhaps, there never was a Time at which more was done by natives, or more entrusted to them, than

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<sup>71</sup> Mountstuart Elphinstone to John Adam, 7 May 1814, in *Ibid.*, p. 323.

<sup>72</sup> *Ibid.*, 322.

<sup>73</sup> Barry Close to Marquess Wellesley, 21 Dec. 1801, in *Poona records*, vol. VII, p. 6; Thomas Sydenham to Arthur Wellesley, 29 Jan. 1805, in *Ibid.*, pp. 188.

there was then at Hyderabad under Captain Sydenham, and at Poona under Colonel Close.’ This led Russell to conclude, when it came time for him to take up the mantle of Resident at Hyderabad in 1811, that ‘a native servant must be employed [...] call him what you will, but such a man must be had, must very frequently be employed and trusted.’<sup>74</sup> The munshi’s social and cultural capital, added to the sheer volume of Residency business, meant that the Resident could hardly afford to dispense with the help.

Despite the language of malfeasance and mistrust with which so many Residents spoke about them, munshis were nevertheless integral to the workings of the Residency. In consequence, Residents were apt to do anything in their power to keep a skilled and hard-working munshi in their employ. Munshi Azizullah, for one, had to petition several times for a pension enabling him to retire; his first effort earned him only an increased salary, with, as Resident James Achilles Kirkpatrick noted sarcastically, ‘the pleasing prospect of being a drudge in office for nearly the remainder of his days, for it is not reasonable to suppose that Government will dispense with the services of so useful a man, as long as they think they can have any service out of him.’<sup>75</sup> Though Residents sometimes spoke of munshis as a group with suspicion, in many cases these partnerships lasted decades, often surviving the Resident’s professional peregrinations throughout the subcontinent. To take just one example, Pearee Lall served under Archibald Seton for 24 years in Bengal, Behair, Bareilly, and, finally, at the Residency at Delhi; Seton described Pearee Lall as ‘able and zealous,’ declaring that ‘he has served me with credit to himself & with the utmost fidelity.’<sup>76</sup> It is worth observing that in this case Seton was writing a character reference in support of Pearee Lall’s application for a pension; these kinds of reference letters constitute the main instances in which Residents openly expressed their gratitude to their munshis, and they typically did so in very generic terms.<sup>77</sup> Still, the fact of the Resident’s support for his munshi, added to the longevity of the relationship, would appear to substantiate affirmations of the munshi’s diligence and utility, and of the Resident’s own feelings of attachment.

In addition to these written expressions of appreciation, the degree of respect conferred on the munshi was made manifest in the customary practice of endowing them with ceremonial robes. The *khilat* was granted to the munshi as, in the words of Resident Richard

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<sup>74</sup> Henry Russell to Charles Russell, 14 Jun. 1810, Russell Papers, MSS Eng. lett. D. 151, Bodl. Oxf., p. 119-120.

<sup>75</sup> J.A. Kirkpatrick to William Kirkpatrick, 14 Nov. 1800, Private letters from his brother James Achilles Kirkpatrick, Papers of Maj-Gen William Kirkpatrick, Mss Eur F228/12, OIOC, p. 259

<sup>76</sup> IOR/F/4/371/9244. Other examples of long-serving *munshis* include Ali Naqi Khan, John Baillie’s *munshi* for thirty years (see IOR/F/4/372/9249), Cursetji Sait who served at Poona for thirty years, and Gholaum Mahomed who served with Richard Jenkins for eight years (IOR/F/4/1473/5782).

<sup>77</sup> Letters of recommendation were a recognized and highly-coded genre. See Tavor Bannet, *Empire of letters*, p. 61-62.

Strachey, 'a public acknowledgement of his services.'<sup>78</sup> This ceremony was a self-conscious appropriation of Mughal court ritual. *Khilats* were given as a means of establishing and proclaiming an almost organic bond between an authority figure and a subordinate, symbolically incorporating the recipient into the body of the giver.<sup>79</sup> Residents like Strachey sought purposefully to take on the role of Indian patrons, and to behave to their subordinates in what they perceived to be a manner that would be intelligible to munshis and their peers.<sup>80</sup> This was a form of 'position-taking.'<sup>81</sup> Through this public performance, the Resident actively affirmed and advertised his vertical relationship with the munshi, thereby visibly establishing his own authority while at the same time clearly co-opting the social capital of the munshi.

These vertical relationships could yield practical benefits. The experiences of munshi Muhammad Hanif exemplify the favours a munshi could secure through the intercession of his British patrons over the course of his life. To begin with, Colonel Barry Close, formerly Resident at Poona, wrote to Henry Russell, the newly appointed Resident, recommending Muhammad Hanif for the position of head munshi; Muhammad Hanif, the Colonel claimed, 'writes Mahratta as well as the Persian Language and is well acquainted with characters and affairs in the Deccan.'<sup>82</sup> Later, when Muhammad Hanif was ready to retire, Close interposed to secure him a land grant and the command of a body of horse at Hyderabad, ensuring him an income that would see him through his remaining years. When financial reforms in Hyderabad put Muhammad Hanif's tax collection rights in peril, Resident Mountstuart Elphinstone, who had known the munshi at Poona, intervened to get Muhammad Hanif a substitute land grant in Company territory in the Deccan.<sup>83</sup> Throughout his life, Muhammad Hanif appears to have been able to call on the aid of Company officials to pursue his own ends, demonstrating how munshis could put their personal connections with their British employers to practical use.

The interaction between Resident and munshi, in short, illustrates what Anthony Giddens termed 'the dialectic of control.' In Giddens's view, even when relationships are deeply asymmetrical, they nevertheless retain a degree of complementarity; the superior figure might have greater resources at his command, but he depends on his subordinate to undertake certain tasks. The dialectic of control, to quote sociologist Ira J. Cohen, 'refers to

<sup>78</sup> Richard Strachey to J.W. Sherer, 14 Mar. 1812, Richard Strachey Papers, Mss Eur D514/1, pp. 85.

<sup>79</sup> Cohn, 'Representing authority in Victorian India', p. 168-169.

<sup>80</sup> For examples of Residents dispensing *khilats* to *munshis* see memorandum enclosed in G. Moore, Civil Auditor, to Arthur Henry Cole, 24 Nov. 1815, BC, IOR/F/4/527/12633, OIOC, p. 8-9; Richard Jenkins to John Adam, 12 Feb. 1816, BC, IOR/F/4/1473/5782, OIOC, p. 4.

<sup>81</sup> Ira J. Cohen, *Structuration theory: Anthony Giddens and the constitution of social life* (Houndmills, Basingstoke, 1989), p. 210.

<sup>82</sup> Barry Close to Henry Russell, 24 Jun. 1810, Sir Barry Close Papers, Mss Eur D1053, OIOC, n.p.

<sup>83</sup> Extract Political Letter from Bombay, 2 Mar. 1822, BC, IOR/F/4/762/20696, OIOC, p. 1-3.

this universal presence of imbalanced degrees of autonomy and dependence that constitute power relations in systems and reproduction circuits of all kinds.’<sup>84</sup> Even though Residents sought to limit the munshi’s field of autonomy, munshis were nevertheless able to secure certain advantages through the provision of services which were indispensable to the Residency, belying the disparaging stereotypes about the munshi which were so prevalent within the political line. At the same time, although this relationship with the Resident created opportunities for the munshi, it also produced frictions. A munshi’s relationship with the Resident seems to have been complicated by the fact that the Resident, too, was an intermediary; the Resident’s place within the Company, as well as his pre-eminent position at court, meant that the munshi was doubly exposed to the caprices of Company and courtly politics. To properly evaluate the munshi’s position, his relationship with the Resident needs to be situated within this wider fabric of social relations of which it was a part. In so doing, it becomes clearer how disparate lines of personal and professional affiliation could come into conflict, often to the munshi’s disadvantage.

### 3. Broadening the scope of analysis

The Resident was a representative figure who derived his power and authority from his position in the Company; it was this corporate connection which made him valuable as a patron. For one thing, the Company could bring significant economic resources to bear because of its access to British credit. It has been convincingly argued that the Company’s army provided more reliable salaries, pensions, and other kinds of benefits for its soldiers, which in turn allowed the Company to monopolize the Indian military market; the same might be said, to some extent, of its Residencies.<sup>85</sup> Although the provision of pensions was only properly institutionalized in the 1830s, from an early period many Residency munshis were provided with life-long salaries or grants of land to reward them for their services, and after their deaths it was not unusual for the Company to continue to support their wives and families.<sup>86</sup> Some munshis were certainly left in dire financial straits, but their petitions to the Company suggest that they had had reasonable expectations of provision for their old age on the basis of these kinds of precedents.<sup>87</sup> Bhugwunt Rao, munshi at the court of Daulat Rao Sindia, reproached the Governor-General that ‘having long served the British Government with fidelity and zeal I am now reduced to great want and ready to expire.’ Bhugwunt Rao

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<sup>84</sup> Cohen, *Structuration theory*, p. 151.

<sup>85</sup> Cooper, *The Anglo-Maratha campaigns*, p. 311.

<sup>86</sup> Fisher, *Indirect rule in India*, p. 332. For examples of these arrangements, see John Adam to Richard Jenkins, 17 Aug. 1816, BC, IOR/F/4/1473/57822, OIOC, p. 13; Extract Political Letter from Bombay, 2 Mar. 1822, BC, IOR/F/4/762/20696, OIOC, p. 1-3.

<sup>87</sup> Mir Ibn Alli to N. B. Edmonstone, 7 Oct. 1810, In-letters 1810 July-Dec, Persian Correspondence, Minto Papers, MS 11583, NLS, p. 174-175.

pointed bitterly to the example of his predecessor in office munshi Kaval Nain, who had been awarded a *jagir* just a few years previously, arguing that ‘I who have been a faithful servant of the British Government for a period of 30 years am better entitled than him to the favour of the honorable Company.’<sup>88</sup> Bhugwunt Rao had been betrayed by the system, but his allusions to the favours to which he felt entitled suggest the financial motivations he might have had for associating himself with the Company in the first place. Enam Allah, a former munshi of the Resident John Collins who also found himself in a dismal financial situation, similarly appealed to ‘the established practice of the British Government which abandons none of its servants or dependants to wander abroad in search of bread,’ thereby securing for himself a pension of 200 rupees per month.<sup>89</sup>

Perhaps just as enticing was access to the patronage of other Company officials, indeed, to a whole institutional network upon which the munshi could draw for support and assistance. Residents regularly manipulated the munshi’s ties to serve their own ends, using the munshi’s acquaintance with literati at other courts as a channel for political information.<sup>90</sup> Munshis, however, also cashed in on the Resident’s social capital. Given the geographical spread of the Company as an institution, it made sense for munshis to cultivate good relationships with British officials who could help forge connections with patrons in other parts of India. Munshis fully exploited this perk of the job; the correspondence of the Residents is rife with examples of letters written to colleagues on behalf of Indian secretaries. Often it was in pursuit of legal aid, usually respecting the munshi’s landholdings or investments in distant parts of the subcontinent. The Resident at Nagpur Richard Jenkins, for instance, appealed to John Baillie, Resident at Lucknow, seeking legal aid for his former munshi, Mir Ghulam, who complained that a person named Saddick Ali was building on a piece of his property in Fyzabad. Jenkins asked Baillie, on behalf of Mir Ghulam, to ensure that the affair would be properly adjudicated.<sup>91</sup> Through access to the Resident’s personal and professional network the munshi was also able to enjoy a range of employment opportunities. To take just one example, Mir Kazim Hussain, initially employed by Mountstuart Elphinstone as second in the Persian Department on Elphinstone’s mission to Afghanistan, was able, once the mission was over, to acquire a position under Elphinstone’s close friend Richard Strachey

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<sup>88</sup> Bhugwunt Rao to Earl of Minto, 13 Jul. 1810, In-letters 1810 July-Dec, Persian Correspondence, Minto Papers, MS 11583, NLS, p. 24-25.

<sup>89</sup> Enam Allah to Minto, received 28 Aug. 1808, BC, IOR/F/4/297/6840, OIOC, p. 6.

<sup>90</sup> Fisher, *Indirect rule in India*, p. 326. For example William Palmer to Marquess Wellesley, 8 Apr. 1799, in *Poona records*, vol. VI, p. 388-90; before war with Tipu, William Palmer’s munshi passed on information he’d received from a friend in the service of a rival power that the Peshwa and Sindhia were conspiring to attack the Nizam and form an alliance with Tipu Sultan.

<sup>91</sup> Richard Jenkins to John Baillie, 21 Jul. 1811, Letter books of Sir Richard Jenkins, Mss Eur E111, OIOC, p. 148-149.

at Sindhia's camp in 1811.<sup>92</sup> A connection with the Company therefore opened up lines of communication and aid to the munshi which might otherwise have been closed to him. The Resident's position in the Company bureaucracy put him at the center of a network of relationships, and this administrative machinery could be set in motion to the munshi's advantage.

At the same time, the nature of the Company as a bureaucratic institution, and the Resident's place as a subordinate within that wider hierarchy, posed problems for the munshi. In particular, there was no guarantee of how long a Resident might remain at court. It could be dangerous for a munshi to rely too heavily on an individual who might well be stationed elsewhere and in any case would likely return permanently to Britain at some point. To some extent, the munshi could expect to benefit from the networks of the Resident or those of the Company more generally to furnish him with employment or other kinds of financial support upon the Resident's departure from court. As previously mentioned, Enam Allah Kahn, who declared himself 'dependent on Colonel Collins' and who on Collins death was 'exposed [...] to alarm and distress,' was subsequently able to secure a Company pension.<sup>93</sup> Still, depending upon the circumstances of the Resident's withdrawal, the munshi might be left with nothing. Ibn Ali, for instance, seems to have had a good thing going as Thomas Sydenham's head munshi at Hyderabad. According to Henry Russell, Sydenham's assistant, 'Ibn i Ally has exercised more Authority than ever Uzeez Oolah [his predecessor] did in the very zenith of his Power.' This power had made Ibn Ali an important patron in his own right; Russell referred bitterly to 'the Swarm of Locusts that he has invited from the Countries of the north.' In 1810, however, Thomas Sydenham was disgraced because of his imbrication in an army uprising, and consequently forced to return to Britain. Following Sydenham's departure, Ibn Ali was left without protection, and Henry Russell's first act on taking up the Residency was to send him away.<sup>94</sup> Ibn Ali's reversal of fortunes highlights the insecurity of the munshi's position given that the Resident was often his single, unstable link to the Company and its resources. More specifically, it suggests the dangers of acquiring too much power within the Residency; the appearance of influence could alienate the munshi from other employees of the Company who might, ultimately, replace the Resident upon whose complicity the munshi, to some degree, depended.

It is worth noting that allegations of impropriety, and the appearance of undue influence on the part of a munshi, was also perceived to reflect on the morals and character of

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<sup>92</sup> Richard Strachey to C.A. Molony, 4 Jan. 1817, Richard Strachey Papers, Mss Eur D514/3, OIOC, p. 225.

<sup>93</sup> Enam Allah Khan to Minto, received 28 Aug. 1808, BC, IOR/F/4/297/6840, OIOC, p. 5.

<sup>94</sup> Henry to Charles Russell, 31 May 1810, Russell Papers, MSS Eng. lett. D. 151, Bodl. Oxf., p. 93.

the Resident in question. To return to the previous example, though Henry Russell determined to replace Ibn Ali as head munshi at Hyderabad, he also decided, as he put it, to let the munshi go ‘quietly, and without any digging into his past Conduct.’ In so doing, Russell was explicitly motivated by ‘Delicacy towards Sydenham,’ who would be implicated in any misdeeds which Russell might unearth.<sup>95</sup> Bhavani Raman has argued that, in the context of the local revenue office, Company officers often portrayed their Indian subordinates as corrupt as a way of deflecting these allegations from themselves.<sup>96</sup> In the political line, however, it seems that it was less easy for Residents to dissociate themselves from their munshis. This intimate connection was the subject of scrutiny and suspicion, given broader reformist trends within the Company and Britain at large, whereby accountability and transparency in the civil service were increasingly emphasized.<sup>97</sup> The problem was that in practice the close working relationship between Residents and munshis made questions of responsibility difficult to resolve conclusively; it was hard to determine who to blame when things went wrong, particularly given the Residency’s geographical isolation from the Company’s administrative centres. The fates of Residents and Residency munshis were thus, to some extent, intertwined; the one was liable to suffer from the misfortunes of the other.

The example of John Baillie and munshi Ali Naqi Khan illustrates this entanglement. Baillie and Ali Naqi Khan had traversed the subcontinent together filling various Company posts over the course of several years before finally settling at the Lucknow Residency. When the munshi faced the potential loss of some landholdings, primarily because of a disputed will, Baillie tried to use his influence with the Nawab Vizier to restore Ali Naqi Khan’s property. When his exhortations to the Nawab Vizier proved unsuccessful, Baillie brought the munshi’s petition before the government, arguing that the munshi’s long service to the Company entitled him to the Governor-General’s support. At that time, the then-Governor-General Lord Minto interpreted the munshi’s difficulties, and the Vizier’s unwillingness to intercede in his favour, as part and parcel of the Vizier’s opposition to the Company. Accordingly, Minto pressured the Vizier to restore Ali Naqi Khan’s property.<sup>98</sup> A few years later, however, when Marquess Hastings took office as Governor-General, he saw the entire affair in a different light. Hastings viewed the supposed restoration of Ali Naqi Khan’s property, a transaction that had taken place without any due investigation into competing claims, as clear proof that Baillie was using the Company’s power, and his status as Company representative, to pursue his own ends. Hastings’s belief was that political instability in India was at least partly a consequence of the Residents’ tyrannical treatment of Indian rulers, and

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<sup>95</sup> Ibid.

<sup>96</sup> Raman, *Document Raj*, p. 26.

<sup>97</sup> Harling, *The waning of ‘Old Corruption’*, p. 22.

<sup>98</sup> Extract Political Letter from Bengal, 24 Jul. 1811, BC, IOR/F/4/372/9249, OIOC, p. 2.

Baillie's actions in favour of Ali Naqi Khan appeared to substantiate this view. In Hastings's mind, the problem was that Baillie had developed extensive patronage networks which were beginning to spiral out of control, impeding Baillie's foremost responsibility to conciliate the reigning monarch. As Hastings put it, because Baillie's Indian agents were 'essentially recognised depositories of his Power,' Baillie 'could not sacrifice those dependents to His Excellency's indignation without giving up all hope of keeping together a Party,' and was therefore 'constrained to uphold them in confessed opposition to their Sovereign.'<sup>99</sup> In line with this interpretation of the relationship between Resident and munshi, the property that had been reclaimed by Ali Naqi Khan was restored to his rivals, and a commission was created to investigate the dispute; John Baillie was removed from Lucknow shortly thereafter.<sup>100</sup> In this case, the personal fortunes of Ali Naqi Khan and John Baillie were subject to shifts in Company personnel and policy, in light of which their relationship came to seem suspicious; in the end, their interests were determined to be dangerously linked.

Figures at court and the surrounding area were equally apt to bracket Residents and munshis together, often to the munshi's disadvantage. To revert to the previous example, when asked to explain the reasons for his conflict with the Resident John Baillie the Vizier blamed the tensions between them on a misunderstanding generated by Baillie's munshi Ali Naqi Khan, claiming 'that Col. Baillie was a good man but that he had been misled by the moonshee.'<sup>101</sup> Similarly, when a petition was presented to the government of Fort St George on behalf of some inhabitants of Travancore, accusing the Resident John Munro of tyranny and corruption, most of the accusations actually centered on the activities of Munro's munshi. Reddy Rao was accused of accepting bribes, and of conferring titles upon the Rani as a pretext for taking gifts from her. Reddy Rao was even blamed for causing a 3-month-long famine by ordering merchants not to sell their stores of rice. Colonel Munro was implicated in these crimes only because, as the petition stipulated, 'Colonel Munro reposing all his confidence on his said Dewan Reddee Royer behaves himself pursuant to the said Reddee Royer's evil persuasions. So that they seem to have one Soul in two bodies and consequently their conduct is arbitrary and tyrannical.'<sup>102</sup> Conditions in Travancore were thus attributed to Reddy Rao's evil influence rather than to the Resident himself, who was portrayed rather as Reddy Rao's willing puppet. Passages like these are difficult to interpret. It is entirely possible that these munshis did exert a potent influence over the Residents, just as they were accused of doing, but it is also possible that these accusations were made strategically, based

<sup>99</sup> Removal of Lieut. Col. Baillie from Lucknow, BC, IOR/F/4/510/12267, OIOC, p. 114.

<sup>100</sup> John Adam to John Baillie, 1 July 1815, BC, IOR/F/4/510/12266, OIOC, p. 40.

<sup>101</sup> Richard Strachey to John Adam, 8 Dec. 1815, Richard Strachey Papers, Mss Eur D514/3, OIOC, p. 18; 19.

<sup>102</sup> 'Petition of Soobba Royer and Sanagara Lingum Pillary', Extract Fort St. George Political Consultations, 14 October 1813, BC, IOR/F/4/445/10674, OIOC, p. 15.



on the assumption that the munshi was a more amenable target for criticism than the Resident himself. Generally speaking the influence of munshis is difficult to ascertain, since Residents were unlikely to describe themselves as being under the thumb of their secretaries, though onlookers might describe the relationship in precisely these terms.

Whatever the basis for these accusations might have been, there is no doubt that the munshi's relationship with the Resident placed him in a position of visibility at court which made him susceptible to these kinds of allegations. Indeed, the munshi's association with the Resident seems to have made him an object of antagonism in his own right. This, at least, is what is suggested to us by a petition written by Rajah Kaval Nain, the appointed mediator between the Resident and the Maharajah Daulat Rao Sindhia. Kaval Nain presented himself as an adherent of both parties; as he put it, 'the attachment and loyalty which I have from first to last evinced in my conduct towards the two states is well known and has been often proved.' Sindhia's first minister, however, apparently used Kaval Nain's affiliation with the Company against him in an attempt to reduce the munshi's influence with Sindhia by arguing that Kaval Nain's first loyalty was to the British. Indeed, according to Kaval Nain, the minister 'treated me in a bad and improper manner, in order that no one for the future might exert himself to support the friendship between the states.'<sup>103</sup> Though Kaval Nain claimed never to have lost Sindhia's ear, and to be continually advising him to ally with the English (thereby trying, no doubt, to emphasize his own continuing utility to the Company), the first minister nevertheless succeeded in confiscating Kaval Nain's property and expropriating a large sum of the munshi's money, the reacquisition of which was the motive for Kaval Nain's petition to the Governor-General. Kaval Nain certainly had practical reasons for framing events in this way; by presenting his loyalty to the Company as the chief source of his problems at court, he thereby had some justification for holding the Company accountable for his loss. Still, incidents at other courts would appear to support the idea that a munshi's association with the Company could be a liability. Gopal Rao, the Peshwa's agent at the Poona Residency, was also accused of being 'an adherent of the Company,' and consequently was 'much alarmed for his own safety', according to the Resident William Palmer.<sup>104</sup> In the words of Thomas Sydenham, who briefly substituted for Palmer at Poona, 'every person who is at all supported by us, becomes an object of persecution to the Minister.'<sup>105</sup> Not only was the munshi vulnerable to the vagaries of Company policy, but his association with it also made him a target for the jealousies and resentments of the courtly elite.

<sup>103</sup> Kaval Nain to John Malcolm, 23 Jun. 1805, HM, IOR/H/625, OIOC, p. 155.

<sup>104</sup> William Palmer to Marquess Wellesley, 16 May 1800, HM, IOR/H/576, OIOC, p. 126. Also William Palmer to Marquess Wellesley, 20 Mar. 1801, Correspondence of William Palmer, HM, IOR/H/576, p. 631-632.

<sup>105</sup> Thomas Sydenham to Barry Close, 17 Jun. 1805, in *Poona records*, vol. X, p. 259.

The antagonism of the court was all the more threatening because the Resident was not a reliable ally against them. From the Resident's perspective, the joint demands of fulfilling his official duties and conciliating the local monarch generally took precedence over his accountability to his Indian staff. The strict lines of authority within the Company sometimes competed with, and in these instances tended to outweigh, links of personal loyalty and dependence. In consequence, the Resident was often prepared to abandon his munshi by the wayside if circumstances seemed to demand it. A single case study will suffice to illustrate this point. In 1801 Resident William Palmer learned that his munshi Mir Fukhir al Din was rumoured to be involved in a conspiracy to depose the current ruler of Poona. One of the conspirators had been arrested, and charges were now being brought against the munshi. The munshi solemnly denied that he had played any part in the scheme. Indeed, Palmer himself recalled the munshi mentioning certain ambiguous advances that had been made to him in the past by some of the conspirators, though neither Palmer nor the mir had then realized the full extent of the plot. Palmer was thus forced to conclude that 'if a mere knowledge of the Intrigue to this extent only is criminal towards the Peshwah, I am as culpable as Meer Fukir ul Dien.' Although Palmer explained away his own silence by claiming that it was not his responsibility to inform the Poona government of any plots against it, he nevertheless felt that circumstances required that he dismiss Mir Fukir al Din from his service, whether the Mir was guilty of the accusations of conspiracy or not. As Palmer put it,

though I know that I not only have a right, but it is my Duty as a public Minister to protect my Servants, until their conduct is proved to be unjustifiable, I will wave these Considerations rather than expose the public Business to interruption or afford the Peshwah a pretext for asserting that I countenance intrigue against his Person and Government.<sup>106</sup>

In short, Palmer sacrificed his munshi to the interests of the Company at the court of Poona, concealing his knowledge of events which might have exculpated the mir. Palmer did not escape from this predicament entirely unscathed; his reputation does seem to have been vaguely tarnished by Mir Fukhir al Din's reputed activities. Henry Russell, for one, blamed Palmer for munshi Mir Fukhir al Din's alleged misconduct; Russell observed that 'under the Ascendancy of Sir Charles's [Malet] Talents and Dignity, he [Mir Fukhir al Din] was honest and useful; but the weakness and good nature of Colonel Palmer encouraged and permitted him to be a Rogue.'<sup>107</sup> Still, the fact of the matter was that Palmer kept his job and Mir Fukhir al Din lost his; Palmer, given his association with the Company and his status as Resident, was too prestigious to become collateral damage to courtly intrigues.

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<sup>106</sup> William Palmer to J.A. Kirkpatrick, 18 Jul. 1801, Private letters from his brother James Achilles Kirkpatrick, Papers of Maj-Gen William Kirkpatrick, Mss Eur F228/13, OIOC, p. 106-109.

<sup>107</sup> Henry to Charles Russell, 14 Jun. 1810, Russell Papers, MSS Eng. lett. d. 151, Bodl. Oxf., p. 120.

The Resident would occasionally intercede in the munshi's favour, but only when personal obligations and public responsibilities were in alignment. For instance, Richard Strachey, newly appointed to the position of Political Resident at Lucknow, refused to dismiss Ali Naqi Khan when the Nawab Vizier of Awadh demanded it; Strachey declared that he 'could not admit the propriety of his [the Vizier's] interference [...] regarding the members of my household.'<sup>108</sup> Significantly, Richard Strachey described the munshi Ali Naqi Khan as a member of his household, a concept widely current in eighteenth-century Britain defined in terms of spheres of authority and household management.<sup>109</sup> By attempting to abrogate the Resident's power within his own household, the monarch was infringing on the Resident's domestic authority. The Company's authority was implicated as well on such an occasion; to surrender one of its employees would be tantamount to suggesting that the Company was incapable of looking out for its own. In instances such as these, the Company's reputation for good faith was perceived to be at stake, and, in the words of John Malcolm in his 'Notes of instruction,' 'whenever that is concerned, the tone of our feeling should be very high.'<sup>110</sup> When the Resident at Poona intervened to protect the munshi Byajee Naique against the Peshwa's first minister, the Resident explicitly justified his intervention on the grounds that it would act as 'a wholesome check upon the Minister,' showing him that the Company were prepared to use their influence over the Peshwa when necessary. An association with the Company could, it seems, occasionally counteract the disfavour of notable figures at court; it could not, however, be trusted implicitly in a context when personal and professional affiliations were not infrequently in conflict.

The munshi was therefore often forced to respond to circumstances not of his making, without even being able to place entire reliance on his patron. His position at the intersection of court and Company, though it opened up certain opportunities, also required him to be highly adaptive. The multiple contingencies to which the munshi was subject made the future difficult to judge, requiring him to be acutely attuned to changing circumstances in the present.<sup>111</sup> Though the munshi played a crucial part in the operations of the Residency, he could never quite enjoy the luxury of resting on his laurels and looking with confidence into the future. Like so many cultural brokers in similar situations around the world, maintaining his precarious position required the munshi to be constantly on the alert as he navigated the turbulent waters at the confluence of the local and the global.

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<sup>108</sup> Richard Strachey to John Adam, 5 Dec. 1815, Richard Strachey Papers, Mss Eur D514/3, OIOC, p. 19.

<sup>109</sup> Tadmor, *Family and friends*, p. 20; 24.

<sup>110</sup> Malcolm, 'Notes of Instruction', in Briggs, *Letters*, p. 218

<sup>111</sup> Emirbayer and Mische, 'What is agency?', p. 994.

## Conclusion

In conclusion, the relationship between Residents and munshis, though of great practical importance to both parties, was also a source of considerable risk. The Resident's attitude towards his munshi was inflected by negative stereotypes of Indian political culture as well as, it would appear, the conventional distrust of a master towards his servant. This relationship was equally coloured by the Residents' fear of being misled or misrepresented in a context where his grasp of the dominant language and ruling political norms was weak; in this context, the usual lines of authority structuring the relationships between master and servant were jeopardized. From the point of view of munshis, an association with the British Resident had definite practical benefits; the Resident was not only an attractive source of patronage in his own right, but could provide access to a broader patronage network which spanned the subcontinent. Still, the Resident could be unreliable; while in some instances the Resident was able to protect his munshi from the disfavour of the monarch, his willingness to do so was entirely dependent on circumstances. Ultimately the Resident prioritized his own interests and those of the Company above the interests of his staff, privileging professional over personal responsibilities. Indeed, because of his intermediary status, and his prominent place in the Company and the local court, an association with the Resident actually doubled the potential problems from the munshi's perspective by exposing the munshi to scrutiny from both British and Indian onlookers.

From the Resident's perspective, too, the munshi posed something of a dilemma. On the one hand, it was feared that Residents who relied too heavily on their munshis were liable to exploitation or suspicions of malversation; from an outsider's perspective, their agency could become indistinguishable from that of the munshi, over whom they feared they could never enjoy complete control. On the other, Residents who dispensed with a munshi's services risked committing damaging social and political faux-pas. To most Residents it seemed clear that there was a balance to be struck somewhere between the two, but where that middle ground was to be found remained a problem. Henry Russell was certain that a munshi was requisite at the Residency, but nevertheless remarked that the particular nature of that employment depended upon 'circumstances casual and fluctuating.' It was up to the Resident to determine, in his words, 'what Business is to be transacted verbally, and what in writing; upon which occasion the Resident is to appear himself, where he is to employ his Assistants, and where he is to confide in a native servant.'<sup>112</sup> This lack of definition sometimes created the space and flexibility for the munshi to acquire a position of recognized influence and

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<sup>112</sup> Henry Russell to Charles Russell, 14 Jun. 1810, Russell Papers, MSS Eng. lett. d. 151, Bodl. Oxf., p. 119.

authority within the Residency, but it was equally likely to make the munshi a target of resentment and distrust.

Circumstances changed as the nineteenth century wore on and the Company's bureaucracy matured. By the 1830s, the relationship between the Residents and the Residency munshis was increasingly subject to the oversight of the Governor-General-in-Council, who became more and more involved in processes of appointment, promotion, dismissal, and the provision of pensions. At first glance, one might suppose that these trends provided munshis with greater security. Whereas previously the munshi had been vulnerable to the whims of the Resident, with little guarantee of security or right of appeal and little consistency in terms of the award of pensions, by the nineteenth century the institution of formal rules furnished the munshi with clear expectations and solid grounds for making claims against the Company.<sup>113</sup>

Nevertheless, it is also possible that something was lost in the process. As Max Weber observed, 'bureaucracy succeeds the more it is dehumanized – the more it eliminates from official business all feelings of love, hatred, all purely personal, irrational, and emotional elements which escape calculation.'<sup>114</sup> The impersonal regulatory apparatus often comes at the cost of older structures of sympathy and obligation. What the munshi might have gained in terms of the acquisition of clearly-defined rights, he may well have lost in terms of his ability to exploit the Residents' social capital and feelings of personal duty. After all, the interference of the Company had the potential to break up partnerships which had previously spanned decades. This process of bureaucratization, rather than eliminating the risks to which the munshi was vulnerable, merely transformed them. Instead of being subject to the whims of the Resident, over whom the munshi could exercise some leverage, he was now increasingly exposed to the vagaries and changing policy of the Company, over which he had far less control. At the same time, as this chapter has shown, the munshi had long been subject to the impersonal, bureaucratic forces at work in the Company hierarchy. Sometimes the munshi had succeeded in using personal connections to put the Company's formal organizational structures to good use, but the Resident's position within a wider hierarchy meant that to some extent the relationship between the two had always been shaped, at times shattered, by shifts in the Company's higher echelons.

Though the resources available to them were very different, the members of the royal family were faced with a very similar problem to the munshis in the Residents' employ. As the Company's reach extended further across the subcontinent, Indian royalty had to decide for themselves how to secure their own best interests in an environment of instability and

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<sup>113</sup> Fisher, *Indirect rule in India*, p. 331.

<sup>114</sup> Max Weber, 'Bureaucracy', in *The anthropology of the state: a reader*, eds. Aradhana Sharma and Akhil Gupta (Oxford, 2006), p. 58.

change. The solutions to this quandary differed dramatically from person to person; in some instances, royal family members were the Company's greatest allies, while in other cases they represented their greatest foes. Either way, royal family members found that they had to engage to some extent with the Resident if they were to continue to be players in the contested field of courtly politics. The Residents, meanwhile, recognized that royal family members had the power to promote or prevent their agendas from taking shape, and acknowledged that they could ill afford to ignore the kinds of patrimonial conflicts which they might have preferred to dismiss as family squabbles.

## Chapter 5. Family dynamics and patrimonial politics

When the Marquess of Hastings decided to tour the Northwest Provinces shortly after his arrival in India in 1814, he charged the Resident at Delhi Archibald Seton with a somewhat intractable problem. Seton was asked to manage the ceremonial encounter between the Governor-General and the King of Delhi, as he was then called, in a way that would reflect the political superiority of the Company, without offending the feelings of the so-called king of kings. Seton accordingly wracked his brain for ways of exempting the Marquess from making the usual signs of deference, particularly the imperative to remain standing in the royal presence. In the end, Seton could recommend only one solution. 'I have [...] been endeavouring to discover a principle or precedent calculated to meet both the feelings of the King and the wishes of your Lordship', he wrote, 'and this I can only do by a reference to your Lordship's descent and illustrious pedigree', alluding to the Marquess' distant connection to the British royal family. Princely descent was, in Seton's mind, 'unquestionably the plea most likely to be understood and admitted by the feelings of the king', whereas 'with respect to the office, high as it is, of Governor General, the feeling of the King would rather be supported than opposed by precedent'.<sup>1</sup> Regardless of the power which the Governor-General wielded as the dominant political authority in the subcontinent and commander-in-chief of one of the largest standing armies in the world, it was his tenuous relation to the King of England, and the charisma conferred by that blood connection, which entitled him to approach the King of Delhi on a footing of near equality.

Whether the Company liked it or not, in a hereditary monarchy kinship mattered; it entitled a person to privileges and respect. In consequence, the king's family could exercise a kind of authority which even the most senior Company officials had to take seriously. Yet this brand of hereditary power has been relegated to the background in contemporary scholarship on South Asian kingdoms. The weight of historical inquiry has tended to fall on imperial bureaucracy, on tax-collection and record-keeping; less attention has been paid to the ruler and his extended household, apart from a handful of cultural histories of the royal harem.<sup>2</sup> Perhaps the explanation is to be found in the way in which modern historians commonly define 'the political'. The Mughal bureaucracy resembles to some degree the present-day, western state with which we are familiar, with its hierarchical organization, written regulations, and trained officials; its patrimonial side, the imbrication of kinship, sex and power, less so. A study of royal families would also seem to come dangerously close to being

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<sup>1</sup> Archibald Seton to Marquess of Hastings, 6 Jun. 1814, Cleveland Public Library Papers, IOR Neg 4227, wq091.92 Ea77p9, OIOC, p. 118-120

<sup>2</sup> Most notably Ruby Lal, *Domesticity and power in the early Mughal world* (Cambridge, 2005).

an outdated history of great men and women, in stark contrast to administrative histories peopled by lowly scribes and clerks, touching on issues surrounding property and landholding, traditionally favoured topics in Indian social and economic history.

At the same time, to ignore the dynastic side of Indian politics, and the scheming, intrigue, and revolt with which it was rife, is to ignore one of the biggest quandaries confronting the Residents as they attempted to consolidate their influence at Indian royal courts. As André Wink famously argued, *fitna* (roughly, intrigue and sedition) formed a crucial element of political practice in India, central to the establishment and maintenance of sovereignty.<sup>3</sup> *Fitna* entailed forging alliances and marshalling support, and in this context, as Sumit Guha has shown, ‘the exploitation of both family loyalties and their dark face- familial hatreds – was an important resource’.<sup>4</sup> If the Resident was to succeed in this world, he had to draw on every advantage available to him. His position as an outsider made it even more important that he cultivate the support of royal family members, arguably the ‘insiders’ par excellence. The extensive royal family, with its shifting internal rivalries, enmities, and affective bonds, was after all the very basis upon which the notion of indirect rule rested; the whole premise of rule by proxy was that the Company could draw on the authority of these kinds of local elites to maintain order and stability.

The importance accorded to heredity was thus an ongoing problem which the Company, as a bureaucratic entity, struggled to contend with in the early nineteenth century. For kinship in India could be messy and oblique from an outsider’s perspective, complicated by practices of polygyny, adoption, and domestic slavery which Company officials did not clearly understand and found difficult to elucidate given their exclusion from the domestic realm of the zenana. The nineteenth-century British household too could be flexible and capacious, of course, but the rule of primogeniture created a clear line of royal succession, at least; in India brothers, uncles, and cousins could all levy a claim to the throne. Succession crises aside, family rivalries could create serious unrest because royal power was conceived loosely, belonging in some degree to the patriliney as a whole. In some cases, inheritance was even divided between siblings; the brother of the Rajah of Berar had extensive territories of his own in Cuttack and Chhattisgarh, for example.<sup>5</sup> Royal family members could therefore muster significant social, cultural, and economic capital in support of their various personal and political projects. In consequence, the Resident had to think carefully about how to conduct himself when the interests of royal family members converged or conflicted with

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<sup>3</sup> André Wink, *Land and sovereignty in India: Agrarian society and politics under the eighteenth-century Maratha Svarajya* (Cambridge, 1986), p. 26.

<sup>4</sup> Sumit Guha, ‘The family feud as a political resource in eighteenth-century India,’ in *Unfamiliar relations: Family and history in South Asia*, ed. Indrani Chatterjee (Delhi, 2004), p. 76.

<sup>5</sup> H.T. Colebrooke to Marquess Wellesley, 21 Mar. 1801, in *Nagpur records*, vol. I, p. 146.



those of the Company. Royal family members, men as well as women, could be crucial allies, dangerous foes, or occasionally a combination of the two.

The following chapter returns these men and women to their privileged place at the centre of the sweeping maelstrom of early nineteenth-century Indian courtly politics. The first two sections will consider male relatives, and the obstacles and opportunities they represented from the Resident's perspective. Section 1 will consider the recurring problems posed by royal successions, while Section 2 will discuss the more quotidian roles which royal brothers could play in the Residents' schemes. The second half of the chapter will consider female relatives, who raised different issues from the Resident's point of view, and are therefore analysed separately. Section 3 will examine how the Residents' engagement with Indian royal women was mediated by British preconceptions. Section 4 will show how despite these superficial barriers, British Residents and Indian royal women could forge politically and practically important working relationships. All told, this chapter demonstrates the extent to which the royal family constituted both the defining weakness and chief resource of the Company's system of political influence.

### **1. Rebellions, succession crises, and imposed hierarchies of blood and birth**

The period of transition from one ruler to another was a crucial juncture from the Company's perspective; a capable but compliant ruler could greatly facilitate the Company's political and military projects, while a resistant successor could spell instability or even war. Thus, before the Company had even begun to station political Residents at Indian royal courts, they had already meddled in a series of succession disputes, most famously in the Carnatic and in Bengal in the mid-eighteenth century.<sup>6</sup> A hundred years later, it was through the regulation of succession and the notorious 'doctrine of lapse' that the Company pursued its expansionist policies, by annexing states which lacked an officially recognized heir.<sup>7</sup> Succession disputes were thus an important element of the Company's history, from first to last. The aggressive interventionism of the nineteenth century, however, was preceded by a period in which the Company's main concern was to ensure stability and control. Usually, Residents pre-empted and managed succession crises by deciding the heir apparent well in advance, and supporting his ascension to the throne by keeping a military force close at hand.<sup>8</sup> This policy, however, did not go unopposed.

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<sup>6</sup> Fisher, *Indirect rule in India*, p. 141.

<sup>7</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 257-258.

<sup>8</sup> See for example events following death of Nawab Vizier in John Baillie to John Adam, 17 Jul 1814, Lettres received by the agent to the Governor-General, Benares Residency Records, basta no. 12, book no. 55, UPSAA, p. 287-288.

The nature of the elite Indian household meant that royal succession was usually open to a handful of claimants rather than a single heir. To some degree, questions of inheritance and ideas of legitimacy were complicated by polygyny, the practice of taking many wives. Not only were the women of the royal zenana many, sometimes numbering into the hundreds, but they were also differentiated according to multiple, graded forms of marriage and cohabitation; contractual marriages were distinguished from partnerships of pleasure, which in turn were distinct from women given as gifts, or concubines purchased or taken by force. Each different form could imply different rights and expectations, but these hierarchies were not rigidly maintained, and concubines could acquire influence through the favour of the ruler, with or without a formal marriage contract.<sup>9</sup> Perhaps most confusingly, from a British perspective, slavery and kinship could exist on a spectrum; sometimes they were virtually indistinguishable, as Indrani Chatterjee has pointed out.<sup>10</sup> Since wives, lovers, and slaves mixed and intermingled, the line between legitimate and illegitimate children within royal families was negotiable to an extent unmatched in Britain. What mattered in the end was less the legal status of the marriage, than the importance accorded it by the ruler in question; the favoured son of the ruler was usually the offspring of a favourite wife, whatever her family origins. Adoption also allowed the ruler to remould kinship at will, and childless kings regularly adopted the sons of brothers, sisters, or even the children of menial servants to succeed them.<sup>11</sup>

The ruler habitually sought to smooth the line of succession by placing his favoured son in administrative or military positions, thereby publicly expressing his trust in his son's abilities and his intention to pass on the reins of government to him. In the process, the youth was also able to acquire political experience and establish himself at court. The ruler's choice was not incontrovertible, however, and court factions were not shy to intervene in these kinds of succession disputes. The claim of the heir apparent was almost always contested by uncles as well as younger brothers, legitimate and illegitimate, biological or adopted.<sup>12</sup> Just as important as blood or seniority were qualities and connections. Heredity, after all, was understood to constitute only one facet of royal legitimacy; personal charisma and the ability to maintain order were also key.<sup>13</sup> Though the Nawab Vizier of Awadh Asaf ud-Daula went to great lengths to mark out his son Vizier Ali as his heir, investing him with numerous offices

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<sup>9</sup> Michael H. Fisher, 'Women and the feminine in the court and high culture of Awadh, 1722-1856', in *Women in the medieval Islamic world: Power, patronage, and piety*, ed. Gavin R. Hambly (Houndmills, Basingstoke, 1998), p. 491-493.

<sup>10</sup> Indrani Chatterjee, *Gender, slavery and law in colonial India* (New Delhi, 1999), p. 26-27.

<sup>11</sup> Book of Nomenclature, Political and Secret Department, IOR/L/PS/20/H17, OIOC, p. 23.

<sup>12</sup> Fisher, *Indirect rule in India*, p. 140.

<sup>13</sup> Stewart Gordon, 'Legitimacy and loyalty in some successor states of the eighteenth century', in *Kingship and authority in South Asia*, ed. J.F. Richards (Delhi, 1998), p. 341.

and titles in addition to financing his lavish wedding to the daughter of a Lucknow courtier, certain powerful figures at court nevertheless united with the Company to depose him.<sup>14</sup> Vizier Ali's uncles were perceived to have just as much, if not more, of a claim to the *musnud*.

Even though blood connections, narrowly understood, were not requisite for an heir apparent (who could be, and often was, adopted), the Company nevertheless began to use questions of legitimacy to undermine competing claims in succession crises. This ultimately became their strategy in the deposition of Vizier Ali. At first, individuals high up in the Company's administration seem to have doubted their ability to penetrate Asaf-ud-Daula's harem and discover its secrets. In response to rumours circulating about the spurious birth of the recently crowned Nawab, the Governor-General John Shore reaffirmed his support for Vizier Ali's claim on the grounds that the truth or falsity of the rumours could not be conveniently proven. In Shore's mind, the crux of the problem inhered in the nature of Indian elite family life: 'the secrets of a Haram are seldom penetrable, and if it were otherwise, the attempt to unveil them would be an insult, and no Prince in a situation to resist enquiry would admit of it'.<sup>15</sup> Further, Shore averred that 'to institute a public investigation into the secrets of the seraglio, would affect our reputation in a degree which no professions of our regard for Justice would ever efface'.<sup>16</sup>

Still, questions of access and etiquette, though they represented superficial barriers to Company surveillance, did not in fact prevent the Residents from doing their best to track the most intimate activities of the women in the zenana in their efforts to manage the question of royal succession. Despite his professed repugnance at attempting to unravel the mysteries of the harem, Shore subsequently plunged into precisely such an investigation, minutely probing into the most private aspects of the former Vizier's sexual activities in his endeavour to ascertain the legitimacy of the new Nawab Vizier. Reliant primarily on the testimony of the former Nawab Vizier's trusted eunuch, Almas Ali Khan, the Governor-General reported that Asaf ud-Daulah was not only sexually impotent, but known to have procured pregnant menial servants for his zenana to compensate for his childlessness; Vizier Ali was apparently the product of such a transaction. Vizier's low birth was believed to manifest itself in his

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<sup>14</sup> John Monckton, 'Translation of the narrative of Vizier Ali', 2 Jun. 1814, Cleveland Public Library Papers, IOR Neg 4227, wq091.92 Ea77p9, OIOC, p. 333-334; John Monckton, 'Memorandum respecting the state of Vizier Ali's family as far as it is known', Cleveland Public Library Papers, IOR Neg 4227, wq091.92 Ea77p9, OIOC, p. 239.

<sup>15</sup> Minute of the Governor General, 20 Oct. 1797, Cleveland Public Library Papers, IOR Neg 4215, wq091.92 Ea77m5, OIOC, p. 246

<sup>16</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 254

‘fearless, debauched [...] sanguinary & uncontrollable disposition’, and in ‘a series of actions, mean, profligate & vicious’, not least his overt defiance towards the Company.<sup>17</sup>

While Shore argued that to support the succession of a known bastard would disgrace the Company in the eyes of the Indian elite, one wonders whether Vizier Ali’s chief crime was his refusal to sanction the influence of the Company or its agents at court. Still, the example of Vizier Ali illustrates how sexuality and heredity could become political, how the salacious gossip of the bazaar could become the stuff of official reports and correspondence. Though the Company often trumpeted their determination not to intrude into the Indian domestic sphere (a claim which historians have since proven to be hollow even with regards to the general population), these platitudes were obviously inapplicable where royal families were concerned.<sup>18</sup> Births and marriages were rigorously recorded to amass useful political intelligence and trace emerging configurations of hereditary power, for in India, as in Britain, marriages in the royal family were strategic and political, used to cement alliances and accrue resources and status.<sup>19</sup> Recognizing the importance of marriages, the Company were increasingly bold about insisting on their rights to this information. When the Kootluck Begum (a noblewoman resident in Benares) attempted to marry her granddaughters to the princes of Delhi, for instance, she was reprimanded by the Governor-General-in-Council for not communicating her intent through official channels. The Resident at Benares William Brook was instructed to remind her of her duty to the Governor-General, as well as to ‘request her royal highness to specify the princes to whom her granddaughters have been betrothed and report their names for the information of the government’.<sup>20</sup> In this instance, the Governor-General was probably concerned that this marriage would augment the status and charisma of one of the Mughal Emperor’s younger sons, thereby undermining the claim of the Company’s own candidate for the throne. By keeping track of royal marriages in this fashion, Residents and other Company officials sought to pre-empt the formation of courtly factions and the possibility of succession crises which would have to be stifled or resolved if the Resident were to maintain control.

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<sup>17</sup> Minute of the Governor General, 13 Jan. 1798, Cleveland Public Library Papers, IOR Neg 4215, wq091.92 Ea77m5, OIOC, p. 362; 357.

<sup>18</sup> For example, Anglo-Indian law shaped property regimes and inheritance patterns, contributing to women’s economic dependence on male relatives; see Rochisha Narayan, ‘Widows, family, community, and the formation of Anglo-Hindu law in eighteenth-century India’, *MAS*, 50:3 (2016): 866-897.

<sup>19</sup> Stephen P. Blake, ‘Returning the household to the patrimonial-bureaucratic empire: Gender, succession, and ritual in the Mughal, Safavid and Ottoman empires’, in *Tributary empires in global history*, eds. Peter Fibier Bang and C.A. Bayly (Houndmills, Basingstoke, 2011), p. 18-19.

<sup>20</sup> N.B. Edmonstone to W.A. Brooke, 18 Jan. 1808, Letters received by the agent to the Governor-General at Benares 1807-1808, Benares Residency Records, basta no. 11, book no. 48, UPSAA, p. 92.

To illustrate the way family and factional feuds could intersect, and to give some context for the discussion of family relations that follows, it is worth exploring in some depth the contest for the Peshwaship that played out during the late eighteenth and early nineteenth century as one typical example of the kind of Indian royal family drama which the Residents were seeking to stamp out or repress. In the second half of the eighteenth century, at the height of Maratha power, Raghunath Rao (also known as Raghoba), son of the late Peshwa Baji Rao and brother to the then-ruler Balaji Baji Rao (popularly known as Nanasahib Peshwa), figures in regional historiography as something of a villain, always seeking his own aggrandisement at the expense of his male relatives. Raghunath Rao's efforts came to a head in 1772, when he assassinated Narayan Rao, his nephew and the successor to the Peshwaship, and sought the *musnud* for himself. Although Raghunath Rao was deposed shortly thereafter, replaced by the infant Madhav Rao II under the influence of the famous Maratha minister Nana Fadnavis, Raghunath Rao's rival claim continued to haunt the politics of Poona in the form of his three sons, Baji Rao, Chimnaji Appah, and Amrut Rao, confined in the fortress of Sewernee. Even during the period of their exile, the three brothers were apparently upheld by a faction of Raghoba's erstwhile supporters at court, 'who endeavoured, by every means, to exalt the character of the prisoners, and lower the reputation of Nana Furnuwees'.<sup>21</sup>

When Madhav Rao II died in an untimely fashion (contemporaries disputed whether he had fallen or purposely thrown himself from his balcony), the three brothers quickly became the focus of rival intrigues among Poona's warring factions. Baji Rao had been favoured for the succession by his cousin Madhav Rao, but Nana Fadnavis instead proposed that Yessooda Bai, the widow of Madhav Rao, should adopt a son who would subsequently inherit the *musnud*.<sup>22</sup> Meanwhile, beleaguered courtiers seeking to undermine the power of the minister Nana Fadnavis chose instead to support the claim of Baji Rao's younger brother Chimnaji Appa, whisking the youth away against his will to Satara to be clothed in the robes of investiture, and then arranging for him to be adopted by the royal widow Yessooda Bai.<sup>23</sup> Although Baji Rao managed to oust his brother with the support of the Company, and quickly had the adoption of Chimnaji annulled, his struggles were not over; a few years later, rival Maratha chieftains Sindhia and Holkar attempted to replace Baji Rao on the *musnud* with his nephew, Benaik Rao, son of Baji Rao's adopted brother Amrut Rao. Sindhia's choice was conditioned by the fact that Amrut Rao had conspired with Sindhia against Baji Rao for many years 'to render the Peishwa a pageant of State', according to the Resident William Palmer.<sup>24</sup>

<sup>21</sup> James Grant Duff, *A history of the Mahrattas* (London, 1826), p. 124.

<sup>22</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 127.

<sup>23</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 131.

<sup>24</sup> William Palmer to Marquess Wellesley, 21 Mar. 1800, Correspondence of William Palmer, HM, IOR/H/576, OIOC, p. 2.

Unsurprisingly, therefore, when Baji Rao reclaimed the throne with the aid of the Company, relationships between the brothers were strained, and Amrut Rao withdrew from Poona to live a life of exile under the close supervision of the Company.

To avoid this kind of political instability, Residents tended to throw their weight behind older siblings on point of principle; the result, it would seem, was the weakening of Indian monarchies. In the past, succession crises had amounted to a kind of natural selection favouring the candidate with the strongest support base. Company interference, however, meant that potentially more suitable successors were bypassed, forced to give way to siblings who did not necessarily share the same interest or ability. Understandably, this policy generated significant resentment at court. Suddenly, age hierarchies and ideas of legitimacy which had previously been negotiable were rendered rigid and unbending. Some younger brothers did try to use Company intervention to their advantage and win the Company to their side, conciliating with the Resident rather than opposing him.<sup>25</sup> More often, however, princes aligned themselves against the Company, often to the point of violence. The most famous instance of this was when the exiled former Nawab Vizier Ali, assisted by a few close retainers, murdered the senior judge at Benares and his four guests on 15 January 1799, shortly after breakfast. Evading British forces, Vizier Ali fled the city to unite with his supporters and mount a full-scale rebellion to reclaim the throne of Awadh. Over the course of the following months, Vizier Ali joined with bands of marauders to plague the British troops, before finally surrendering to capture and living out his days in exile, imprisoned in the British fortress at Vellore.<sup>26</sup>

Though the account of George Cherry's tragic death made Vizier Ali a villain of the highest order in British public opinion, the events leading up to that armed confrontation over the breakfast table were not so very unusual. There is a pattern of bypassed younger princes becoming rallying points for disaffected individuals looking to act out their resentments and sense of disempowerment. During the reign of Sikander Jah, Nizam Ali's successor, British onlookers complained that his sons, 'after the manner of Moosulman princes all over the world, collected about them all the dissolute vagabonds of the city, by whose agency they prosecuted a regular system of insult and extortion'.<sup>27</sup> Mubariz ud-Daula, one of Nizam Sikandar Jah's younger sons, described as 'headstrong, obstinate and rapacious', was

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<sup>25</sup> Henry Russell, 'The condition and resources of the Nizam's government', Russell Papers, MS. Eng. misc. c. 324, Bodl. Oxf., p. 47.

<sup>26</sup> John Neave to George Barlow, 15 Jan. 1799, Letters issued by the agent to the Governor General at Benares, Benares Residency Records, basta no. 1, register no. 3, UPSAA, p. 220.

<sup>27</sup> Henry T. Prinsep, *History of the political and military transactions in India during the administration of the Marquess of Hastings 1813-1823* (London, 1825), p. 262.

particularly known to have ‘always hated the English’. According to the Resident at Hyderabad Henry Russell, ‘when the Nizam insisted on posting a guard from Captain Hare’s brigade at Moobariz ood Dowlah’s house, the latter declared “that he would lose his Life rather than suffer a Guard to be posted over him from any Corps commanded by a European”’.<sup>28</sup> After a long period of escalating tensions, the crisis came to a point when Mubariz ud-Daula and his brothers seized an attendant of the British Resident, looking to extort money from him; a military confrontation seemed imminent, as the Residency’s infantry attempted to take the prince’s houses. Afraid of a general insurrection, the Resident’s men backed down and waited for reinforcements; in the end the ferment in the city subsided of itself and the princes surrendered to the Nizam, who acceded to the Resident’s request to have them imprisoned in the nearby fortress of Golconda.<sup>29</sup>

A similar and perhaps even more notorious incident occurred in Delhi when Prince Mirza Jahangir, the third and favoured son of the King, briefly took control of the Red Fort. Irritated and resentful at the Resident’s attempt to control his drinking by prohibiting wine vendors from selling their wares in the palace precincts, the young prince barred the gates of the fort against the Resident. Shots were fired, but in the end, the revolt proved short-lived; Mirza Jahangir surrendered to the Resident and was confined in the fortress at Agra.<sup>30</sup> One of the Resident’s secretaries attributed Mirza Jahangir’s attempted insurrection to his association with European gentlemen, through which he ‘had imbibed notions of liberty very inimical to the policy of our Government respecting native princes’.<sup>31</sup> Also clearly at issue, however, was the Resident’s persistent opposition to Mirza Jahangir’s status as favoured son and heir apparent, much to the dismay of the Emperor Akbar II and his favourite wife, Mumtaz Mahal.<sup>32</sup>

In response to crises like these, rooted in what they perceived to be the unruliness of the Indian family, British Residents and their superiors hardened their commitment to strict principles of primogeniture. Not only did they place an unprecedented emphasis on a narrow understanding of blood and legitimacy, they adhered to a hierarchy of birth order which favoured eldest sons. Historians have interpreted the Company’s management of succession disputes as a sign of their growing power over Indian kingdoms, but the Company’s influence in this regard did not go unchallenged.<sup>33</sup> Although the Company sought to preclude violent

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<sup>28</sup> Notes and intelligence of Mountstuart Elphinstone regarding the Peshwa and Trimbuckjee, Elphinstone Collection, Mss Eur F88/60, p. 35.

<sup>29</sup> Prinsep, *History*, p. 263-265.

<sup>30</sup> Extract of Letter from Bengal, 19 Oct. 1809, BC, IOR/F/4/334/7657, OIOC, p. 2-4.

<sup>31</sup> Alexander Fraser to his mother, 23 Dec. 1810, Fraser of Reelig Papers, vol. 33, NRAS, p. 219.

<sup>32</sup> For the long-running dispute over the appointment of the heir apparent, see Panikkar, *British diplomacy in North India*, p. 20-42.

<sup>33</sup> Fisher, *Indirect rule in India*, p. 144; Ramusack, *The Indian princes and their states*, p. 138.

succession crises by intervening in support of elder sons, in practice this policy merely served to foment the ambitions of younger brothers who knew well that they had historical precedent on their side. Vizier Ali was only the most notorious instance of the kind of trouble that could erupt in consequence of the simmering resentments of male relatives. These insurrections proved brief and easily stamped out, but they were nevertheless recurring. Aggrieved royals could almost always find supporters to rally to their cause, suggesting that many people refused to accept the legitimacy of the rules imposed by the Company.

## 2. Bad blood: arbitrating fraternal conflict

Violent uprisings exemplify opposition between siblings in its most extreme form, but even in the absence of such acts of rebellion, the fluidity of the rules governing royal succession soured relations between royal brothers whose shared heredity made them rival claimants. Siblings Baji Rao, Chimnaji Appa, and Amrut Rao were apparently very close during their long imprisonment in an isolated fortress, but their intimacy was quickly and irredeemably dispelled when the *musnud* came into play.<sup>34</sup> Even after Amrut Rao had willingly withdrawn to the Company's dominions, for a long time the Peshwa continued to hold Amrut Rao's adherents, as well as their family and servants, in confinement.<sup>35</sup> Male relatives of the ruler were usually subject to suspicion and surveillance, and not infrequently to imprisonment or exile.<sup>36</sup> By comparison, the ruler's closest friends and counsellors generally seem to have been slaves or individuals of lowly origins. In a context where the ruler's kin posed a threat through their own potential claims to the *musnud*, vulnerable rulers were perhaps understandably prone to attach themselves to people who presented no such challenge.<sup>37</sup>

British administrators certainly recognized the logic behind this pattern, but the ruler's preference for slaves and servants above members of their own family was nevertheless a tendency the Residents and their superiors found perplexing and disagreeable; unsurprising, perhaps, given the centrality of kinship networks to the pursuit of the economic

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<sup>34</sup> Henry Russell to John Monckton, 23 Sept. 1810, enclosed in John Monckton to W.A. Brooke, 10 Nov. 1810, Letters received by the agent to the Governor-General at Benares, basta no. 11, book no. 51, 1810, UPSAA, p. 245.

<sup>35</sup> Arthur Wellesley to Barry Close, 14 Dec. 1804, Arthur Wellesley Papers, Mss Eur E216, OIOC, p. 52.

<sup>36</sup> Henry Russell notes that the brothers of the Nizam 'live in an easy kind of restraint, and never appear in public.' Notes and intelligence of Mountstuart Elphinstone regarding the Peshwa and Trimbuckjee, Elphinstone Collection, Mss Eur F88/60, OIOC, p. 37.

<sup>37</sup> Chatterjee, *Gender, slavery and law*, p. 43.



and political aspirations of the gentry in Britain and the empire.<sup>38</sup> Baji Rao was criticized for his 'habits of suspicion & vigilance' as well his fondness for 'the Company of low dependents', 'too low to be feared' and 'too servile to irritate'.<sup>39</sup> The Governor-General-in-Council similarly belittled the Nawab Vizier Saadat Ali Khan's suspicious conduct towards his brother and officially expressed their concern that 'His Excellency should condescend to distinguish by his public favour men notorious for the depravity of their lives and the infamy of their characters', who were 'calumniators of the most respectable subjects of his Government'.<sup>40</sup> Likewise, when the Nizam Sikander Jah approached the Resident about rumours regarding a plan on the part of the Company to depose him and place his brother on the throne, Thomas Sydenham, in his own words, 'treated the Nizam's Fears with ridicule.'<sup>41</sup> The Residents, regularly inundated with questions and concerns regarding the threat posed by royal brothers, resented the manner in which they were called on to arbitrate family differences and begrudged the extent to which the investigation of these conspiracy theories sapped their time and resources.<sup>42</sup>

Though Residents often expressed frustration at what they perceived to be the petty squabbles dividing male members of the royal family, these recurring tensions sometimes worked to the Company's benefit. Royal brothers were often inclined to seek a rapprochement with the Resident as a counterpoint to the ill will of the ruler.<sup>43</sup> In return for the Company's protection and support, they could provide vital political intelligence. This was a recurring pattern at the court of Nagpur, where the relatives of the Rajah Raghoji Bhonsla were the Resident's most prized allies and informants, at the same time as they were the Rajah's most committed enemies, rebelling openly, plotting against his life, and intriguing to divide and undermine his government.<sup>44</sup> Vincaji Bhonsla, for instance, the brother of Raghoji, looked to the Company as a crucial safeguard at a time when his brother kept him detained at the capital with his life on the line. As the Resident interpreted it, 'if the influence

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<sup>38</sup> Will Coster, *Family and kinship in England 1450-1800* (Harlow, 2001), p. 44; Julia Adams, *The familial state: Ruling families and merchant capitalism in early modern Europe* (Ithaca, NY, 2005), p. 32-33; Finn, 'Anglo-Indian lives in the later eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries', p. 49.

<sup>39</sup> Mountstuart Elphinstone to Marquess of Hastings, 20 Nov. 1815, Cleveland Public Library Papers, IOR Neg 4226, wq091.92 Ea77p5, OIOC, p. 248-249.

<sup>40</sup> Extract Political Letter to Bengal, 14 Sept. 1808, BC, IOR/F/4/311/7097, OIOC, p. 2, 5. See also Extract Secret Letter from Bengal, 20 August 1806, BC, IOR/F/4/216/4755, OIOC, p. 5.

<sup>41</sup> Thomas Sydenham to Earl of Minto, 26 Aug. 1808, BC, IOR/F/4/296/6833, OIOC, p. 36.

<sup>42</sup> For instance, Barry Close was approached to act as mediator between the Peshwa and Chimnaje Appa, who was dissatisfied with his treatment. Extract Political Letter from Bengal, 4 Aug. 1809, IOR/F/4/311/7097, OIOC, p. 3.

<sup>43</sup> Notes and intelligence of Mountstuart Elphinstone regarding the Peshwa and Trimbuckjee, Elphinstone Collection, Mss Eur F88/60, OIOC, p. 37.

<sup>44</sup> Mountstuart Elphinstone to Marquess Wellesley, 20 Dec. 1804, Papers concerning the war with Holkar, HM, IOR/H/626, p. 566.

of the British Government were established at this Court he naturally judged that it would be restraint on Raja Raghojee Bhonsla sufficient to prevent any gross injustice or act of violence', and therefore 'showed himself zealous to promote the measure'.<sup>45</sup> This zeal was manifest in Vincaji's willingness to pass on important information regarding the activities of his brother, including Raghoji's endeavours to unite the Marathas in a confederacy against the British in the prelude to the Second Maratha War.<sup>46</sup>

Similarly, in 1817 Gujaba Dada, a cousin of the reigning Rajah of Nagpur Appah Sahib, took refuge at the British Residency for fear of assassination at the hands of his jealous cousin, and even went so far as to seek asylum in Company territory for a few years.<sup>47</sup> Richard Jenkins, Resident at Nagpur, recognised the use which alienated relatives like Gujaba could have. 'In the discontents [...] of his Nephew, and of the old adherents of that branch of the family, means of no inconsiderable force to shake the foundations of the state of Nagpore, might be found.'<sup>48</sup> Jenkins' observations proved prescient; Gujaba Dada subsequently repaid his debt to the Company in the days leading up to the final Maratha War, when he and his family provided invaluable support. 'To them,' Jenkins claimed, 'I owe much of the intelligence which has enabled me to defeat the Rajah's treacherous designs'.<sup>49</sup>

Though royal family members could be helpful if so inclined, calling on their support was not without hazard. By becoming too intimate with royal family members, the Resident risked exciting the resentment of the ruler himself, who was, after all, the person who had it most in his power to advance, or thwart, the designs of the Company at court. If the Resident wanted to cultivate both sides at once, he had to do so deftly and discreetly, without making too many promises. To revert to a previous example, when Vincaji Bhonsla desired to meet with the Resident's munshi to establish communications with the Residency, the two arranged to rendezvous 'as if by accident at a place of worship'.<sup>50</sup> Later, when Vincaji Bhonsla dispatched confidential agents to the Residency with secret information, Colebrooke was careful to ensure that, though he expressed his gratitude for Vincaji's communications, he at the same time 'neither flattered his hopes, nor excited his expectations', and in fact displayed

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<sup>45</sup> H.T. Colebrooke to Marquess Wellesley, 21 Mar. 1801, in *Nagpur records*, vol. I, p. 146. Also, A collection of original memoirs illustrative of the revenues, resources, statistics and governments of the modern states of the Dekan, Mackenzie General Collection, Mss Eur Mack Gen XLIII, OIOC, p. 308.

<sup>46</sup> H. T. Colebrooke to Marquess Wellesley, 22 May 1801, in *Ibid.*, p. 3; H. T. Colebrooke to Marquess Wellesley, 14 May 1801, in *Ibid.*, p. 149.

<sup>47</sup> Papers on Hindustan, Nagpur, and Maratha Affairs, HM, IOR/H/506a, OIOC, p. 190. Extract Political Letter from Bengal, 15 Jan. 1820, BC, IOR/F/4/718/19537, OIOC, p. 1-3.

<sup>48</sup> Richard Jenkins to Marquess of Hastings, 5 Sept. 1816, Cleveland Public Library Papers, IOR Neg 4226, wq091.92 Ea77p5, OIOC, p. 434.

<sup>49</sup> Richard Jenkins to Marquess of Hastings, 7 Dec. 1817, Copies of letters from Richard Jenkins, Grant-Duff Papers, Mss Eur F311/10, OIOC, p. 34.

<sup>50</sup> H. T. Colebrooke to Marquess Wellesley, 14 May 1801, in *Nagpur records*, vol. I, p. 149.

a decided 'aversion from intrigue'. Colebrooke's objective in so doing was to guarantee that he could claim plausible deniability if these exchanges ever came to light; not only was the information unsolicited, but Colebrooke could say that he had discouraged Vincaji's secretive conduct (nominally, at least).<sup>51</sup>

Sometimes, in the interests of keeping relations with the ruler on a solid footing, Residents did have to reject the assistance of male relatives altogether. The risk was that, by accepting their help, Residents might upset the uneasy equilibrium at court by empowering the relative concerned at the expense of the ruler in power. For instance, while the Company enthusiastically accepted a sizeable loan from the Nawab Vizier Ghazi-ud-din Haidar to fund their war with the Gurkhas, they deemed it 'inexpedient' to accept such a loan from his brother the nabob Shums ud-Daula, who had enjoyed the support and favour of the deceased Nawab Saadat Ali Khan and was therefore perceived as a rival by the reigning Nawab.<sup>52</sup> By accepting this loan, the Company would have conferred a degree of prestige on Shums ud-Daula which would have attracted the jealousy of the ruling Nawab Vizier, since it would, by implication, have placed them on an equal footing in terms of their respective relations with the Company.

Despite the Residents' best efforts, however, sometimes the rift between brothers proved irremediable. When the Company failed to maintain good relations between male relatives, they usually took it upon themselves to arrange for their exile. Rebels like Vizier Ali or the young Mirza Jahangir, for instance, were accorded the status of state prisoners, and sent to live in Company territory, to be supervised by Company agents. Banishment of political rivals or vanquished rebels had a long tradition in Europe as in India; the underlying rationale was that once out of sight, the individual in question could no longer act as a rallying point for resistance. His absence would ideally put him out of mind and eventually allow him to be conveniently forgotten, whereas his execution might have rendered him a martyr.<sup>53</sup> Exile was a particularly attractive option given powerful taboos against flogging or executing Brahmins; banishment was a way of punishing high-status individuals without social stigma.<sup>54</sup>

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<sup>51</sup> H. T. Colebrooke to Marquess Wellesley, 22 May 1801, in *Ibid.*, p. 3. Colebrooke even refused to meet with one of the Rajah's nephews out of a desire to avoid secret meetings; see H.T. Colebrooke to Marquess Wellesley, 24 Aug. 1800, in *Ibid.*, p. 127.

<sup>52</sup> J. Monckton to W.A. Brooke, 26 Jul. 1815, Letters received by the agent to the Governor-General in Benares 1815, Benares Residency Records, basta no. 13, book no. 56, UPSAA, p. 299.

<sup>53</sup> Robert Aldrich, 'Out of Ceylon: The exile of the last king of Kandy', in *Exile in colonial Asia: Kings, convicts, commemoration*, ed. Ronit Ricci (Honolulu, HI, 2016), p. 49.

<sup>54</sup> Clare Anderson, 'A global history of exile in Asia, c. 1700-1900', in *Exile in colonial Asia: Kings, convicts, commemoration*, ed. Ronit Ricci (Honolulu, HI, 2016), p. 22.

The conditions of exile depended upon the extent of the individual's misconduct; rebellious relatives were usually confined in military fortresses far from the land of their birth and kept separate from their wives and children, while relatives who were merely perceived to pose an existential threat to the ruler in power were generally allowed to live more or less independently in establishments of their own in places of their choosing.<sup>55</sup> Male relatives sometimes even chose exile of their own volition, preferring to escape the jealous gaze of their royal siblings, and to retire to the relative calm of the country, or to religious and cultural centres like Benares. The brother of the Peshwa, Amrut Rao, retreated from Poona seemingly of his own will; he claimed to have 'laid aside all worldly concerns,' and to have 'nothing to do with the contentions of Princes.'<sup>56</sup>

Though relatives in these settings could no longer act as informants, or at least not in the same way as they had when positioned at the very heart of courtly politics, sometimes Company officials preferred to keep these dynastic powder-kegs out of the way. When Amrut Rao passed through Berar on his way to reside at Benares, the Resident at Nagpur, 'considering the passion for intrigue which so often infatuates the natives and the discontent which Amrut Rao might be supposed to feel at the Peshwa's treatment of him,[...] thought it prudent to endeavour to keep him out of all situations where he might be tempted to engage in plots and political speculations'.<sup>57</sup> Elphinstone's caution proved well-founded when information later emerged that Amrut Rao was making preparations to effect an insurrection within the Company's provinces, apparently in collaboration with Nana Sahib, the brother of the Raja of Berar.<sup>58</sup> Officials no doubt breathed something of a sigh of relief when Amrut Rao finally settled down at a distance from centres of political intrigue. The isolation of royal brothers does seem to have helped diminish incidences of conspiracy and collusion at court, though the Governor-General-in-Council were nevertheless still keen to ensure that these royal exiles were situated at a point where they were within easy reach of a military cantonment and could be monitored by a Company commissioner.<sup>59</sup>

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<sup>55</sup> Contrast Amrut Rao, who brought his family and a large establishment to join him in Benares, with the fate of Vizier Ali, who was imprisoned in a fortress and separated forever from his wives and children; see J. Monckton to Marquess Wellesley, 2 Jun. 1814, Cleveland Public Library Papers, IOR Neg 4227, wq091.92 Ea77p9, OIOC, p. 263.

<sup>56</sup> Mountstuart Elphinstone to Marquess Wellesley, 20 Dec. 1804, Papers concerning the war with Holkar, HM, IOR/H/626, OIOC, p. 556.

<sup>57</sup> Mountstuart Elphinstone to Barry Close, 28 Jan. 1805, in *Nagpur records*, vol. I, p. 171.

<sup>58</sup> N.B. Edmonstone to Capt. Roughsede, 9 Nov. 1805, in *Ibid.*, p. 223.

<sup>59</sup> G. Dowdeswell to the Board of Commissions, 18 Jun. 1814, enclosed in N.B. Edmonstone to W.A. Brooke, 23 Jun. 1814, Letters received by the agent to the Governor-General in Benares, basta no. 12, book no. 55, UPSAA, p. 268.

Exile to British territories could also represent a useful means of developing ties with Indian royals and conciliating them to British habits. These men could make attractive claimants when succession crises broke out, given their perceived attachment to the Company. Saadat Ali Khan (a member of the ruling family of Awadh), after many years living in exile in Benares, was said to have acquired 'a fondness for every thing European'. He was excessively devoted to hunting and horse-racing in the English style, and was even known to dress in English riding kit.<sup>60</sup> When the Company decided to dethrone his nephew, Vizier Ali, Saadat was the obvious choice to replace him as Nawab Vizier of Awadh. Similarly, when Vincaji Bhonsla and his family sought refuge in Company territory, the family's resulting attachment to the British was viewed as an asset which could be deployed to the Company's advantage. When Vincaji's son Appah Sahib made his bid for power, acting as regent for his young cousin Parsoji, the Resident supported his claim because his personal history was believed to have made him sympathetic to the British. In Jenkins' view, Appah Sahib's time in Benares, 'combined with the lessons of his father, who looked up to us for support against the Rajah', rendered him 'superior to the vulgar prejudices of the dangers of a connection with us,' leading him 'to trust implicitly to our honor and good faith'.<sup>61</sup>

Despite their roseate expectations, however, in both cases British officials overestimated the exiles' attachment to the Company; neither Saadat Ali nor Appah Sahib were in fact so very devoted to British interests, and the latter openly revolted against the Company in 1817. Moreover, whatever benefits might accrue to the Company through the development of closer links with these royal personalities, even when safely in exile male relatives were an onerous burden for the British officials responsible for managing their interests and concerns.<sup>62</sup> For one thing, the Company was charged with paying out stipends, and often took on the additional task of overseeing budgets as a means of precluding financial embarrassments; Residents seem to have feared that royal relatives might incur debts and find themselves in the shameful position of being put on public trial.<sup>63</sup> After all, the behaviour and lifestyle of brothers could have implications for family honour, meaning that male relatives had it within their power to besmirch the prestige of the ruler concerned if they did not adhere

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<sup>60</sup> 'He always rides in cap and boots, leather breeches, &c, and upon the most capital horses', according to Charles Madan, *Two private letters to a gentleman in England, from his son who accompanied Earl Cornwallis, on his expedition to Lucknow in the year 1787* (Peterborough: 1788), p. 33.

<sup>61</sup> Papers on Hindustan, Nagpur, and Maratha Affairs, HM, IOR/H/506a, OIOC, p. 189.

<sup>62</sup> Letters issued by the agent to the Governor-General in Benares Jan 1798-Feb 1799, Benares Residency Records, basta no. 1, register no. 3, UPSAA, p. 25; 26; 44; 147; 66 for description of work that agent at Benares did (including repairing houses and dispensing stipends) to help Vizier Ali settle down in the city.

<sup>63</sup> G.F. Cherry to George Barlow, 26 Feb. 1798, Letters issued by the agent to the Governor-General in Benares, basta no. 1, register no. 3, UPSAA, p. 25; G.F. Cherry to Alured Clarke, 5 Jan. 1799, Letters issued by the agent to the Governor-General in Benares, basta no. 1, register no. 3, UPSAA, p. 215.

to certain standards of respectability. Tellingly, Akbar Jah threatened his brother the Nizam that if he did not receive land revenues said to have been granted to him by their late father, he would ‘retire to a holy Hill in the neighbourhood of the city, called Mowlah Ally, and assuming the Dress and Habits of a Fakeer’, or Muslim religious mendicant.<sup>64</sup> Even the Nawab Vizier Saadat Ali Khan was keen to ensure that Vizier Ali, the exiled nephew whom he had replaced on the throne, continued to be attended by a *chobdar*, or stick-bearer, to signal his noble-status.<sup>65</sup> By failing to calibrate their own conduct or the conduct of their charges according to fine gradations of status, Company officials were thus at risk of undermining the whole system of hereditary power upon which their influence rested.

Officials were therefore keen to pay the recognition due to these royal family members, carefully regulating ritual practices including the exchange of *nazr* and *khilat*, and the frequency of visits, for example.<sup>66</sup> At the same time, their rights and status meant that male relatives could make a real nuisance of themselves. Magistrates regularly complained that the followers and attendants of royal exiles clashed with local inhabitants and perpetrated acts of violence and ‘outrage’.<sup>67</sup> This was particularly true of Muslim royals who sought asylum in Benares, and offended the locals with what were considered to be immoderate celebrations of Muslim religious holidays.<sup>68</sup> Given their rank and stores of treasure, however, royal exiles could justify large numbers of soldiers and attendants ‘for the Purposes of Parade and the protection of [...] property’, as the Resident at Benares affirmed, even though the followers of Amrut Rao, at least, were described as having the appearance ‘more of a colony than an army’.<sup>69</sup> Royal exiles, in sum, were a drain on the time and energy of local officials, as well as a source of recurring friction with local townspeople.

Moreover, even while living comfortably abroad, some royal elites found it difficult to put their political careers behind them. Though Amrut Rao purported to be perfectly content to live a life of peaceful reflection, his son, Benaik Rao, who had been briefly installed as Peshwa under Amrut Rao’s tutelage, proved more restless. Having become

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<sup>64</sup> Charles Russell to Minto, 2 Mar. 1811, Hyderabad Residency Records, box no. 2, vol. 38, NAI, p. 123.

<sup>65</sup> G.F. Cherry to J. Lumsden, 19 Apr. 1798, Letters issued by the agent to the Governor-General at Benares, basta no. 1, register no. 3, UPSAA, p. 66.

<sup>66</sup> For example see discussion of regulation of ceremonial intercourse with exiled prince Mirza Jahangir in Richard Strachey to W.A. Brooke, Jun. 1812, Letters received by the agent to the Governor-General in Benares 1812, Benares Residency Records, basta no. 12, book no. 53, UPSAA, p. 149-151.

<sup>67</sup> W.A. Brooke to John Adam, 7 Sept. 1818, Letters issued by the agent to the Governor General at Benares 1817-1820, Benares Residency Records, basta no. 3, book no. 14, UPSAA, p. 66; W.A. Brooke to Barlow, 26 February 1798, Letters issued by the agent to the Governor General at Benares Jan 1798-Feb 1799, Benares Residency Records, basta no. 1, register no. 3, UPSAA, p. 25.

<sup>68</sup> Samuel Davis to G.F. Cherry, 21 Jun. 1798, Letters received by the agent to the Governor-General at Benares, basta no. 10, book no. 42, UPSAA, p. 235.

<sup>69</sup> E. A. Broughton to N.B. Edmonstone, Letters received by the agent to the Governor-General at Benares 1804-1805, Benares Residency Records, basta no. 10, book no. 45, UPSAA, p. 121.

‘impatient of the inactive state in which he is compelled to remain at this place’, as the magistrate of Benares described it, Benaik Rao ‘fell into the hands of associates equally restless, and ill disposed with himself’. Together with his friends, Benaik Rao planned to flee the city and seek his fortune, before his intentions were discovered and aborted by his father. For a young man like Benaik Rao, being forced to live a quiet life far from the stage of war and politics on which he might otherwise have distinguished himself was punishment indeed. Having had a brief taste of power, his exile was even more galling. The Company had to be careful of men like these; while Benaik Rao could certainly not take down the Company singlehanded, he was clearly capable of assembling a body of military men to his cause, and could give the Company significant embarrassment and trouble, as the magistrate at Benares recognized.<sup>70</sup>

All in all, male relatives were considered by the Residents as a necessary evil to be managed with delicacy and care. On the one hand, fraternal conflicts, though distasteful to the Resident, could be exploited for valuable political intelligence; moreover, suitably Anglicized royal family members were attractive claimants to the throne when succession crises did break out. At the same time, an alliance with a royal family member could expose the Resident to distrust and suspicion from the ruler in question, nor could the attachment of royal brothers and cousins necessarily be relied upon. To the contrary, male relatives regularly proved unruly and irrepressible, even when supposedly tucked away safely in Company territory. Still, despite the problems posed by male relatives, the Residents’ greatest censure was nevertheless usually reserved for women of the royal household. These wives, mothers, and grandmothers raised unique difficulties and will therefore be the subject of the final half of this chapter.

### **3. Petticoat influence from behind the purdah**

‘A nasty Dame & Bitch’: this is how an East India Company soldier stationed in Delhi described the favourite wife of the Mughal Emperor Akbar II.<sup>71</sup> The language is crude, but the sentiment was not unusual; British commentators commonly described royal wives, grandmothers, and concubines as evil harridans exercising undue influence over emasculated Indian rulers. The stereotype had deep roots; in published accounts of the first British embassy to the court of the Mughal Emperor Shah Jahan almost two hundred years before in 1616, Thomas Roe depicted the Emperor’s romance with his favourite wife, famously memorialised by the Taj Mahal, in similar terms. ‘His motion is inward among women,’ Roe

<sup>70</sup> For information contained in this paragraph see Extract of Political Letter from Bengal, 31 Mar. 1814, BC, IOR/F/4/470/11324, OIOC, p. 1-11.

<sup>71</sup> Robert Macpherson to William Fraser, 21 Jun., B436, Fraser of Reelig Papers, NRAS, p. 16.

observed, 'of which sort, though he keepe a thousand, yet one governs him, and wynds him up at her pleasure'.<sup>72</sup>

Despite the prevalence of these defamatory portraits of ambitious Indian women in British accounts of Indian courtly life, female agency has nevertheless been pushed to the margins in recent scholarship on the Residency system. To the extent that historians have discussed the women in the Residents' lives, the focus has been on their Indian wives and concubines.<sup>73</sup> This tendency seems to reflect a broader development within the field of imperial history wherein the history of intimacy between colonizer and colonized (usually conjugal relations between European men and non-European women) has emerged as a popular way to demonstrate the entanglement of the personal and the political, of private lives and larger patterns of imperial rule.<sup>74</sup> In this view, intimate relationships were a key theatre for the construction and consolidation of racial and gender hierarchies, as well as the development of colonial knowledge.<sup>75</sup>

Still, James Achilles Kirkpatrick's notorious relationship with the Hyderabad noblewoman Khair un-Nissa is the exception, rather than the rule. While many of the Residents did cohabit with Indian women, those we know of were for the most part not local, but had accompanied the Resident from a previous posting. The Residents' domestic arrangements were, on principle, kept rigidly separate from their public life; the women were confined to the Resident's private quarters and even, in some cases, lived at a distance from the Residency building itself, while neither the Residents' Indian concubines nor their European wives figure in surviving letters and papers.<sup>76</sup> On the other hand, the Resident's relationships with the women of the royal zenana, though they could hardly be classed as intimate, could be emotionally fraught and politically significant. Whereas Durba Ghosh had to carefully sift through baptismal records to bring her 'nameless' subjects to light, Indian

<sup>72</sup> William Foster (ed.), *The embassy of Sir Thomas Roe to India 1616-1919* (London, 1926), p. 170-171.

<sup>73</sup> Ghosh, *Sex and the family in colonial India*, p. 69-106, for William Palmer and James Achilles Kirkpatrick and their Indian wives.

<sup>74</sup> For a review of this historiography see Ann Laura Stoler, 'Tense and tender ties: The politics of comparison in North American history and (post) colonial studies', *The Journal of American History*, 88:3 (2001): 829; Elisa Camiscioli, 'Women, gender, intimacy, and empire', *Journal of Women's History*, 25:4 (2013): 138-148; Tony Ballantyne and Antoinette Burton, 'Introduction: The politics of intimacy in an age of empire', in *Moving subjects: Gender, mobility, and intimacy in an age of global empire*, eds. Tony Ballantyne and Antoinette Burton (Urbana, IL, 2009), p. 5-7.

<sup>75</sup> Ann Laura Stoler is the predominant influence in this field; see especially *Carnal knowledge and imperial power*, p. 9. For knowledge production, see Lynn Zastoupil, 'Intimacy and colonial knowledge', *Journal of Colonialism and Colonial History*, 3:2 (2002).

<sup>76</sup> Company officials rarely mentioned Indian concubines in letters home, according to Ghosh, *Sex and the family in colonial India*, p. 10. The Residents' European wives are only mentioned once or twice, eg. Henry Russell's French wife Clothilde, or Richard Jenkins' wife Elizabeth Helen Spottiswoode (daughter of a Company man), whom he married in 1824 shortly before returning to England.



royal women are by contrast almost inescapable from the historian's perspective, their names scattered liberally through the records and correspondence of the Residents.<sup>77</sup> These were women who made themselves heard, sometimes to the exasperation of the Company officials responsible for managing their concerns.

Attitudes towards these royal women were powerfully shaped by contemporary preconceptions about the Muslim harem. Harems were usually portrayed in European art and literature as spaces of chaos and disorder, of material and sexual excess, while harem women themselves tended to be caricatured as immoral and lascivious. Given these preconceptions, stereotypes of Indian women were roughly divided along sectarian lines; Hindu women were commonly lauded as plain-speaking and practical, even when in *purdah*, while Muslim women, it was said, 'do nothing but adorn their persons, study deception, and smoke their *hookahs*'.<sup>78</sup> Some British commentators decried what they perceived to be the oppressive conditions of the *zenana*.<sup>80</sup> The tone of the Residents, however, was sharply censorious; the Nizam's chief consort Jahan Parwar Begum, for instance, was disparaged for her addiction 'to all the disgusting vices which prevail among many of the women of Indian seraglios'.<sup>81</sup>

The basis for this cloud of fear and fantasy encircling the *zenana* was its inaccessibility, which made it a site of gossip and speculation, of imagined theft, slavery, infanticide, and murder. To quote modern historian Janaki Nair, 'by its very unknowability, it was a seat of sedition of intrigue, as much as it was a site of ambiguous sexuality'.<sup>82</sup> As one nineteenth-century historian imagined it, 'there were things done within the precincts of that vast privileged asylum, and duly reported to the Resident, in violation of all laws human and divine'.<sup>83</sup> In addition to its secrecy and mystique, the polygamous household also created an avenue for women of lowly origins to access the springs of power. The most politically active women within the Nizam of Hyderabad's *zenana* were former slaves who had come to exercise influence through the favours of the monarch, for example. These were women who, in the view of the Residents, were 'strongly marked with those characteristic which frequently attend a great and sudden elevation,' being 'haughty, tyrannical, rapacious and

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<sup>77</sup> See Durba Ghosh, 'Decoding the nameless: gender, subjectivity, and historical methodologies in reading the archives of colonial India', in *A new imperial history: Culture, identity, and modernity, 1600-1840*, ed. Kathleen Wilson (Cambridge, 2004), pp. 297-316.

<sup>78</sup> Anne Deane, *A tour through the upper provinces of Hindostan* (London, 1823), p. 94.

<sup>79</sup> Joan DelPlato, *Multiple wives, multiple pleasures: Representing the harem, 1800-1875* (Cranbury, NJ, 2002), p. 162, 164.

<sup>80</sup> Janaki Nair, 'Uncovering the *zenana*: Visions of Indian womanhood in Englishwomen's writings: 1813-1940', *Journal of Women's History*, 2:1 (1990): 15; Metcalf, *Ideologies of the Raj*, p. 94.

<sup>81</sup> Henry Russell, 'The condition and resources of the Nizam's government', 1816, Russell Papers, MS. Eng. misc. c. 324, Bodl. Oxf., p. 50.

<sup>82</sup> Nair, 'Uncovering the *zenana*', p. 11.

<sup>83</sup> Kaye (ed.), *The life and correspondence of Charles, Lord Metcalfe*, p. 249.

officious'.<sup>84</sup> In other words, these women seemingly differed in every respect from British models of aristocratic, feminine gentility.

However condescendingly or disapprovingly Residents might describe the women of the zenana, it is apparent that these individuals were nevertheless a force to be reckoned with. Behind most ambitious young princes were powerful royal women, normally mothers and grandmothers who espoused their cause. In the uncertain days following Asaf-ud Daulah's death, for example, it was the deceased Nawab's mother who provided crucial support to the young Vizier Ali by publicly presenting him with the *khilat* of investiture, a gesture which, the Governor-General judged, 'will perhaps by the native princes of Hindostan, be deemed the most satisfactory refutation of the Reports which have been propagated to the prejudice of his birth.'<sup>85</sup> General opinion, so far as the Resident could learn, was that the young Nawab attracted many followers thanks to the begum's influence.<sup>86</sup> Similarly, it was widely believed at the time that the rebellious princes at Hyderabad were emboldened by the support of the Nizam's mother, Tinat un-Nissa Begum, and the Nizam's first wife, Jahan Parwar Begam, who exercised great influence within the zenana.<sup>87</sup>

Women could also be important patrons to men outside their family circle. There was at almost all courts a general pattern of royal women advancing the careers of favoured ministers, a fact which the Residents noted with dismay. The Rajah of Berar's mother, for instance, supported one of the Rajah's chief ministers 'Buckshee Bhowanni', who was apparently 'more feared than liked', thus giving prominence to a man who might otherwise have gone unremarked or suffered royal disfavour.<sup>88</sup> At Hyderabad, the Resident noted that 'the Nizam's Mahal is the channel thro' which Mooneer ool Moolk principally conducts his Intrigues', and regretted that 'the Tuhnent oo Nissa Begum is so much under the influence of Mooneer ool Moolk, as the Nizam seldom adopts any measure without her Advice and Concurrence'.<sup>89</sup> Munir ul-Mulk's rival in government, Chandu Lal (whom the Company supported in opposition to Munir ul-Mulk), certainly thought the begum's favour worth

<sup>84</sup> Thomas Sydenham to Earl of Minto, 30 Aug. 1809, Hyderabad Residency Records, box no. 2, vol. 38, NAI, p. 79.

<sup>85</sup> Minute of the Governor General, 20 Oct. 1797, Cleveland Public Library Papers, IOR Neg 4215, wq091.92 Ea77m5, OIOC, p. 252. Bahu Begum had also played an important role in the succession of Vizier Ali's father, Asaf-ud Daula; see Barnett, *North India between empires*, p. 100.

<sup>86</sup> Minute of the Governor General, 13 Jan. 1798, Cleveland Public Library Papers, IOR Neg 4215, wq091.92 Ea77m5, OIOC, p. 317.

<sup>87</sup> Prinsep, *History*, p. 262.

<sup>88</sup> H.T. Colebrooke to Marquess Wellesley, 14 Apr. 1799, Memoir of the origin and descent of the Bhooslah family, Wellesley Papers, Add MS 13589, BL, p. 2.

<sup>89</sup> Charles Russell to Minto, 4 Aug. 1810, Hyderabad Residency Records, box no. 2, vol. 38, NAI, p. 79-80. Munir ul-Mulk's predecessor in office, Ragotim Rao, similarly relied on the influence of Tinat un-Nissa Begum, and carried on a regular correspondence with the mahal; see Thomas Sydenham to George Barlow, 13 Mar. 1806, Foreign Secret Department Records, file no. 9, NAI, p. 2-3.

cultivating; when Tinat un-Nissa Begum visited a garden belonging to him in the vicinity of Hyderabad, Chandu Lal 'paid her great Attention, gave her valuable Presents, represented his condition to her, expressed the most cordial Attachment to her Interests, and those of her Family, and sent her Home very much gratified with her reception.'<sup>90</sup> The extent to which courtiers sought to secure the influence and support of the zenana more generally is made evident by the bribes they offered to female attendants in their efforts to establish a channel of communication with the royal women; Mama Barun, the principal female attendant in the Nizam's family, was said to have accumulated a massive fortune in presents and bribes from courtiers anxious to acquire her services.<sup>91</sup> It seems clear that the women of the zenana were recognized to be an effective alternative or counterpoint to the patronage of the Resident at court.

The power of royal women was partly a product of proximity and access. Even though Residents might have used viciously moralizing language to depreciate the zenana, they simultaneously recognized its importance as a political space. Power in Islamic political systems flowed out from the ruler; accordingly, proximity to the ruler was a source of influence. The head of the harem had the kind of access to the monarch that the Resident, who corresponded with him largely by way of munshis and written communiqués, could only envy.<sup>92</sup> This was a recognized obstacle to the transaction of Residency business. All the key European diplomatic manuals emphasized the importance of sociability in an informal context, observing that 'when people begin to be a little warmed with wine, they often discover secrets of importance', yet the Residents were excluded from the spaces of leisure and conversation where the ruler and his friends and family congregated.<sup>93</sup> Henry Russell openly begrudged the manner in which the Hyderabad habit of retiring to the zenana in the evenings precluded homosocial activities, noting that 'they never meet together, but upon occasions of ceremony or business, and every man passes his hours of relaxation and retirement in the secluded privacy of his female apartments'.<sup>94</sup> William Palmer bemoaned his infrequent communications with the Peshwa of Poona and 'the Forms and reserve with which his Intercourse is clogged', while Mountstuart Elphinstone similarly opined that the Peshwa

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<sup>90</sup> Charles Russell to Minto, 25 Sept. 1810, Hyderabad Residency Records, box no. 2, vol. 38, NAI, p. 97-98.

<sup>91</sup> Notes and intelligence of Mountstuart Elphinstone, Elphinstone Collection, Mss Eur F88/60, OIOC, p. 36.

<sup>92</sup> Chatterjee, *Gender, slavery and law*, p. 57.

<sup>93</sup> de Callières, *The art of diplomacy*, p. 116. John Malcolm also advised that it was in 'an unceremonious interchange of visits with the most respectable' that a member of the political line could best effect his objectives, in his 'Notes of instruction' in Briggs, *Letters*, p. 202.

<sup>94</sup> Henry Russell, 'The condition and resources of the Nizam's government', Russell Papers, MS. Eng. misc. c. 324, Bodl. Oxf., p. 7. See also Extract letters to Bengal, 1 Mar. 1812, BC, IOR/F/4/394/10019, OIOC, p. 1

was 'very difficult of access', preferring to enjoy the company of 'his favorites in large assemblies of women, where he enjoys the coarsest ribaldry and buffoonery'.<sup>95</sup>

Elphinstone's complaint is typical; Indian rulers were commonly denounced for spending too much time with the women of their household, or for taking their counsel too seriously. In this, the Residents' attitudes were informed by British assumptions about masculinity and authority. The language used to describe Indian rulers reflected the charges of 'effeminacy' which were so common in eighteenth-century British political discourse and everyday parlance. To be 'effeminate' was to be unmanly or self-indulgent, to associate too much with women or to have sex with men; these were private vices which threatened to seep into public life, impeding a man's ability to act rationally and independently on the public stage.<sup>96</sup> T.D. Broughton was quite clear that the temptations of the zenana had clouded Sindhia's judgement and disrupted his reign; in Broughton's own words, 'women and low company have been his bane; and appear to have quite corrupted a heart and mind originally meant for better things'.<sup>97</sup> Similarly, when a contemporary book authored by an officer in the Indian army described the Nizam of Hyderabad Sikander Jah's unfitness for office, a key justification was that 'he lives almost entirely with women; his business is chiefly transacted by verbal messages communicated by female attendants, and he never goes from one chamber to another, without being followed by four or five women slaves'.<sup>98</sup> The Residents, too, belittled the Nizam for his dependence on the women of his household. When the begums of Hyderabad communicated a rumour to the Nizam regarding the Company's intention to depose him in favour of his brother, the Resident Thomas Sydenham condescendingly, in his words, 'expressed my compassion only that his Highness should seriously entertain such unmanly and absurd suspicions upon the base assertions of ignorant Women'.<sup>99</sup> The Resident's belittling remarks bely the serious frustration he felt at his inability to repress or control the influence which women could exercise in the privacy of the zenana. At Travancore, the Resident Colin Macaulay even resorted to the extreme measure of banishing

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<sup>95</sup> William Palmer to Marquess Wellesley, 16 Jun. 1800, Correspondence of William Palmer, HM, IOR/H/576, OIOC, p. 177; Mountstuart Elphinstone to Marquess of Hastings, 20 Nov. 1815, Cleveland Public Library Papers, IOR Neg 4226, wq091.92 Ea77p5, OIOC, p. 251; 250. See also Report on the Deckan, Elphinstone Collection, Mss Eur F88/219, OIOC, p. 91.

<sup>96</sup> John Tosh, *Manliness and masculinities in nineteenth-century Britain: Essays on gender, family, and empire* (Harlow, 2005), p. 70-73; Anna Clark, *Scandal: The sexual politics of the British constitution* (Princeton, NJ, 2006), p. 10.

<sup>97</sup> Broughton, *Letters written in a Mahratta camp*, p. 124.

<sup>98</sup> An officer, *Origin of the Pindaries*, p. 134. Sikandar Jah's father, Nizam Ali Khan, was likewise described as 'Much addicted [...] to the pleasures of the Haram.' See A collection of original memoirs illustrative of the revenues, resources, statistics and governments of the modern states of the Dekan, Mackenzie General Collection, Mss Eur Mack Gen XLIII, OIOC, p. 301.

<sup>99</sup> Thomas Sydenham to Earl of Minto, 26 Aug. 1808, BC, IOR/F/4/296/6833, OIOC, p. 36.

the Rajah's favourite wife Arumenah Mah as a means of insulating the ruler from faction and intrigue.<sup>100</sup>

It was not only their perceived influence over the ruler which made the women of the zenana such sought-after allies, however; they had other assets which could tilt the balance in a courtier's favour. For one thing, the zenana was a crucial site for the diffusion of news. In the emperor's private quarters, newsletters were read out and agents examined in the women's presence.<sup>101</sup> Royal women corresponded widely and maintained links with geographically distant kin; consequently, they were sometimes the first to hear of events at rival courts. All this made them attractive informants. The Jahan Parwar Begam, niece to the minister Munir ul-Mulk, was apparently especially 'useful in communicating Intelligence to him and conveying his private notes and messages to the Nizam', while Chandu Lal appealed to the female attendants of Tinat un-Nissa Begum to confirm reports about the intentions of the rebel Mohipat Ram.<sup>102</sup> In addition to their information, in some cases the zenanas represented immense repositories of wealth.<sup>103</sup> Historians of the early modern Islamic world have long observed the range of activities engaged in by elite women, contrary to what we might expect of individuals who were supposed to have spent the bulk of their lives at home in the seclusion of the harem. Women collected tax, invested in inland and overseas trade, and profited from the sale of textiles, minerals, and agricultural goods, as well as the duties collected from merchants travelling through their dominions.<sup>104</sup> In consequence, royal women had the financial resources, as well as the charisma, to marshal wider support when necessary. For example, the women of Sindhia's zenana, considering 'their Safety & Interests as inseparable from those of [Balloo] Tantia' (one of Sindhia's chief ministers), were able to bring to bear troops of five or six thousand men in their efforts to coerce Sindhia to release the minister from confinement and return him to his privileged position within Sindhia's counsel.<sup>105</sup>

The example of the Sindhia's zenana, in addition to illustrating the financial and military resources that women could muster, also suggests that female honour could be a

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<sup>100</sup> John Munro, 'Observations on a petition delivered to the Government,' 16 Sept. 1813, BC, IOR/F/4/445/10674, OIOC, p. 114. See also a letter from the vakils of the Rajah of Travancore to Minto, 21 Dec. 1809, In-letters, Persian Correspondence, Minto Papers, MS 11582, NLS, p. 102.

<sup>101</sup> Bayly, *Empire and information*, p. 18.

<sup>102</sup> Henry Russell, 'The condition and resources of the Nizam's government,' Russell Papers, MS. Eng. misc. c. 324, Bodl. Oxf., p. 50; Thomas Sydenham to Minto, 17 Apr. 1808, Foreign Secret Department Records, no. 1, NAI, p. 38.

<sup>103</sup> The mother of Raghoji Bhonsla was rumoured to have died very rich; see Richard Jenkins to Barry Close, 23 Dec. 1809, *Nagpur records*, vol. II, p. 21.

<sup>104</sup> Ellison Banks Findly, *Nur Jahan: Empress of Mughal India* (New York, NY, 1993), p. 110.

<sup>105</sup> William Palmer to Marquess Wellesley, 28 Apr. 1800, Correspondence of William Palmer, HM, IOR/H/576, OIOC, p. 72.

powerful instrument through which women could rally broad-based support. When Mahadji Sindhia passed away, he left his three widows (referred to by contemporaries as ‘the *bais*’) in the care of his nephew, adopted son and successor, Daulat Rao. Daulat Rao had promised to provide for the women, but as time passed he failed to settle them in their own permanent establishment, and denied them many of the creature comforts to which they had been habituated. At this point, the elder widows charged Daulat Rao with engaging in a ‘criminal intercourse’ with the young widow Bhagirathi Bai, ‘at which they openly expressed their abhorrence, and declared they could no longer consider as a son the incestuous defiler of his father’s bed.’<sup>106</sup> The *bais* tried to use this language of shame and disgrace as a means of securing an independent livelihood, separate from Daulat Rao’s household. The allegations, however, only seem to have provoked Sindhia; the women were subsequently seized and flogged. Their treatment, however, drew some of Sindhia’s chief Brahmin officers to their cause. The women, assisted by a number of powerful Maratha *sirdars*, escaped Sindhia’s clutches and assembled a large body of troops, refusing to negotiate with Sindhia until he had met their demands for their future security and subsistence.<sup>107</sup>

Though the *bais*’ forces were initially small, they benefited from the support of Sindhia’s army, many of whom expressed resentment at Sindhia’s treatment of the ladies and even deserted to the *bais*’ cause.<sup>108</sup> As the number of the *bais*’ supporters grew, Sindhia found himself paralysed; he was humiliated by his inability to control dissensions within his family but at the same time unwilling to resort to the use of force, particularly since he seems to have doubted whether his troops would have backed him up in the event of a violent confrontation with the *bais*.<sup>109</sup> In the end, after nearly a year’s stalemate in which the dissension constituted the chief subject of discussion in Maratha political circles, Sindhia finally acceded to the demands of the *bais*, restoring their favoured minister to power, granting them the city of Burhanpore and its dependencies, and a fort at Asseer for their future security.<sup>110</sup> In this instance, the *bais*’ negotiating power rested on their affiliation with the royal dynasty and their share in Sindhia’s inherited charisma; individual honour was closely bound up with lineage, and the honour of families was reflected in the conduct and treatment of its women.<sup>111</sup> Consequently, women could, if necessary, essentially hold their family’s honour hostage. This was also a tactic employed by the widows of the deceased Nawab Vizier when

<sup>106</sup> Grant Duff, *A history of the Mahrattas*, p. 162.

<sup>107</sup> William Palmer to the Governor-General-in-Council, 21 May 1798, in *Poona records*, vol. VI, p. 159-160.

<sup>108</sup> William Palmer to the Governor-General-in-Council, 24 May 1798, in *Ibid.*, p. 162; William Palmer to the Governor-General-in-Council, 28 May 1798, in *Ibid.*, p. 164.

<sup>109</sup> William Palmer to the Governor-General-in-Council, 8 Jun. 1798, in *Ibid.*, p. 169.

<sup>110</sup> William Palmer to the Governor-General-in-Council, 16 Jul. 1799, in *Ibid.*, p. 462.

<sup>111</sup> Richards, ‘The formulation of imperial authority under Akbar and Jahangir’, p. 316.

they objected to the eunuch who had been appointed to oversee their household and dispense their stipends. In this case, the ladies expressed their dissatisfaction by leaving their residence at Faizabad and taking the road to Lucknow in full view of the public, leading the distraught Nawab Vizier to bemoan that ‘disgrace and dishonour such as never before sullied our reputation have now been brought on my House and the circumstances have become notorious to all the world’.<sup>112</sup> Thus, although caricatures of the Muslim harem portrayed royal women as spoiled and indolent, their position at the centre of power, their financial resources, and the charisma they enjoyed as members of the ruling dynasty, meant that women could exercise significant political clout.

#### 4. Bridging the gender frontier

Despite the advantages enjoyed by royal women, Residents tended to belittle their political activities, ascribing their interventions to base avarice and slandering them in sexual terms. These accusations paralleled the denunciations meted out to aristocratic women deemed to have taken an inappropriately active role in British public life. As Anna Clark has pointed out, allegations of sexual misconduct and prostitution were prominent motifs in eighteenth- and nineteenth-century British politics. To take just one famous example, when Georgiana, Duchess of Devonshire canvassed for Charles James Fox in the Westminster elections of 1784, contemporaries speculated that she was trying to pay off her gambling debts, and accused her of being sexually involved with the candidate; caricatures depicted her kissing butchers for votes.<sup>113</sup> Similarly, Tinat un-Nissa Begum, the mother of the Nizam and an active opponent of the Resident at court, was said by him to be ‘not particularly attached to any Party, but takes bribes from all and for the time espouses that side which pays the highest’, with chastity ‘by no means unimpeached’.<sup>114</sup>

This kind of dismissive attitude would seem to foreclose the possibility that the Resident and the women of the zenana could fruitfully act in concert. Yet, however much the Residents might appear on the surface to condemn the political activity of Indian women and their influence on Indian rulers, they also acknowledged that women had their particular uses. In part, the Residents were probably open to women’s political potential because, as members by birth of the political elite in Britain, they were aware of the important role which women often played there. Although in theory British politics was conceived as belonging to the masculine domain, in practice politics in Britain, as in India, was familial and social. As

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<sup>112</sup> Nawab Vizier to Earl of Minto, 20 Sept. 1812, In-letters 1812, Minto Papers, MS 11590, NLS, p. 232.

<sup>113</sup> Clark, *Scandal*, p. 73-74.

<sup>114</sup> Henry Russell, ‘The condition and resources of the Nizam’s government’, Russell Papers, MS. Eng. misc. c. 324, Bodl. Oxf., p. 51.

such, women could and did participate, as hostesses, patronesses, socio-political ‘fixers’ and confidantes, as Elaine Chalus has illustrated.<sup>115</sup> For women born into political families, it was almost expected that they would play their part to support their sons and husbands in their political pursuits. As Amanda Vickery has argued, at a time where so much of a propertied gentleman’s engagement with public life took place within the context of the home, the oppositions which historians have drawn between the public spheres occupied by men, and the private spheres occupied by women, do not make much sense.<sup>116</sup> In European diplomatic culture, as well, the same rules and opportunities applied; de Callières advised diplomats to go to great lengths to endear themselves with the ladies of the court, arguing that ‘the power of their charms has often an influence over the most important resolutions, on which the greatest events depend’.<sup>117</sup> Though some historians of the British empire in India have suggested that the harem’s political character would have broken with modern European concepts of public (and masculine) and private (and female) spaces, these distinctions were not in fact so clear-cut.

Residents, therefore, were not necessarily averse to women exercising political agency, particularly within the bounds of what they considered to be more conventional feminine activities. Ideally, Residents wanted royal women to exercise a moralizing influence, paralleling an emergent model of female domestic influence which Anna Clark attributes to the rising tide of British evangelicalism and the philosophy of sensibility.<sup>118</sup> For instance, from the Resident’s perspective royal women were valued as effective mediators, able to salve the resentments of fathers, brothers, and sons. Thomas Sydenham was explicitly instructed to cultivate a connection with the Bakshi Begum at Hyderabad and to use her as an instrument to conciliate the Nizam to the Company’s policies.<sup>119</sup> The Rajah of Berar’s mother was particularly adept at managing the often fractious relations between her two sons, and was perceived to act as a positive influence on the Rajah’s administration as a result of his veneration for her.<sup>120</sup> Rajah Ragoji himself observed that had it not been for his mother ‘the differences between him & Nana Sahib must ere this have led to a civil war’, and attributed her influence to the fact that he did not punish his brother for his armed depredations along

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<sup>115</sup> Elaine Chalus, *Elite women in English political life, c. 1754-1790* (Oxford, 2005), p. 4; 12-13.

<sup>116</sup> Vickery, *The gentleman’s daughter*, p. 9.

<sup>117</sup> de Callières, *The art of diplomacy*, p. 78.

<sup>118</sup> Clark, *Scandal*, p. 11-12.

<sup>119</sup> N.B. Edmonstone to Thomas Sydenham, 3 Nov. 1806, Hyderabad Residency Records, box 2, vol. 33, NAI, p. 436. Sydenham’s successor, Henry Russell, relied on the Nizam’s favourite wife the Chandnee Begum to moderate the behaviour of her sons when they returned to Hyderabad from their exile in Golconda. See Henry Russell to Marquess of Hastings, 10 Nov. 1820, BC, IOR/F/4/796/21427, OIOC, p. 28.

<sup>120</sup> H.T. Colebrooke to Marquess Wellesley, 21 Mar. 1801, in *Nagpur records*, vol. I, p. 146; Richard Jenkins to Earl of Minto, 28 Aug. 1807, in *Nagpur records*, vol. II, p. 3.



their shared territorial borders.<sup>121</sup> After her death, the Resident anticipated ruptures between the brothers, and worried about the extortionate activities that the brothers might engage in without her moderating influence. As Jenkins noted, ‘there must be many who having formerly owed their safety from the Rajah’s exactions, to the Bai’s influence, now tremble for their persons and property’.<sup>122</sup>

Another important ally of the Company was the Bahu Begum, the widow of Nawab Vizier of Awadh Shuja ud-Daula. Bahu Begum had been Shuja-ud Daula’s chief consort and had provided critical support to him at key points in his reign; as a sign of his gratitude and respect Shuja ud-Daula had entrusted the begum with much of his wealth.<sup>123</sup> After Shuja ud-Daula’s death this vast property gave the begum great clout in the politics of Awadh, but it also made her a target. Initially the Begum was a notorious opponent of the Company, and sought enthusiastically to defend her son Asaf ud-Daula from the Company’s encroachment; however, regime changes in the late eighteenth century also entailed dramatic shifts in the begum’s relationship with the Company, as she sought to secure her wealth and dependents from appropriation by her male relatives.<sup>124</sup> When the Bahu Begum’s son Asaf ud-Daula was succeeded by his brother (and the Bahu Begum’s step-son) Saadat Ali Khan, the begum turned to the Company and initiated a rapprochement, enlisting their support as a guarantor of the promises made to her by Saadat Ali Khan that he would respect her position and property. Subsequently Bahu Begum claimed to regard herself as being entirely under the protection of the East India Company.<sup>125</sup> She maintained a regular correspondence with the Governor-General, sometimes passing on critical political intelligence.<sup>126</sup> During her lifetime, the Bahu Begum promised to make the Company her legatee, and used this promise as leverage to secure the Company’s assistance in defending her financial interests, for instance by incentivizing the Governor-General to take her side in disputes over the inheritance of the wealthy *aumil* Almas Ali Khan.<sup>127</sup> After Bahu Begum’s death, the Governor-General-in-Council was indeed made the trustee of her considerable treasury, along with that of her daughter-in-law and the widow of Asaf-ud Daula, Shums un-Nissa Begum, who similarly

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<sup>121</sup> Mountstuart Elphinstone to Marquess Wellesley, 20 Dec. 1804, Papers concerning the war with Holkar, HM, IOR/H/626, OIOC, p. 566.

<sup>122</sup> Richard Jenkins to Barry Close, 23 Dec. 1809, in *Nagpur records*, vol. II, p. 21.

<sup>123</sup> Barnett, *North India between empires*, p. 76.

<sup>124</sup> Bahu Begum strongly objected to Asaf ud-Daula’s cession of Benares and she and her mother-in-law were prominently involved in organizing armed resistance to the Company in Awadh and Berar during the uprising in Benares in 1780. See Barnett, *North India between empires*, p. 193; 200.

<sup>125</sup> Extract of political letter from Bengal, 13 Jan. 1809, BC, IOR/F/4/304/7000, OIOC, p. 8.

<sup>126</sup> For instance, when Bahu Begum received unauthorized correspondence from the Emperor at Delhi, she transmitted it to the Resident at Lucknow. Extract of political letter from Bengal, 9 May 1810, BC, IOR/F/4/331/7624, OIOC, p. 5.

<sup>127</sup> Bahu Begum to Governor General, 3 Oct. 1808, BC, IOR/F/4/304/7000, OIOC, p. 48.

relied on the Company to defend her interests at court. This trusteeship enabled the Company to acquire a position of authority relative to the begums' significant body of dependents, which included politically powerful eunuchs and other courtly adherents, as well as relatives.<sup>128</sup>

By investing the Company with this trust, the begums were not necessarily seeking to empower the Company relative to the ruling Nawab Vizier of Awadh, who deeply resented the Company's encroachment into this family affair. Rather, the begums were trying to provide for their households and supporters, to ensure that they would be looked after and sheltered from the ruler's disfavour. Shums un-Nissa Begum early on placed her servants, adherents, and relatives under the care of the Governor-General so that, in her words, 'they may be protected from all molestation and oppression', passing on her lands, vessels of gold and silver, and the revenues of the bazaar attached to her palace, to be distributed among her dependents through the agency of the Company.<sup>129</sup> While the actions of these women might have served to consolidate the power of the Company in Awadh by amassing wealth and patronage in the Resident's hands, the begums' primary intent was to secure the futures of those dear to them. As Durba Ghosh observed of women's engagements with the East India Company more generally, although women sometimes exploited the possibilities made available to them in an imperial context, 'this should not lead us to the facile conclusion that colonialism [...] benefited native women.' Rather, 'the activities of the Company opened up limited social, material, and legal opportunities for native women, allowing them some mobility within positions of relative powerlessness.'<sup>130</sup> Royal women, while enjoying all the privileges of wealth and even sometimes political influence, nevertheless had to contend with the fact that the conditions of their lives were still subject, at least to some extent, to the dictates of powerful men, be they blood relatives or strangers from across the sea.

At the same time as Residents sought to enlist royal women in their cause, royal women therefore sought to mobilize the Residents in their interests. It was not unusual for women, for instance, to ask for Company troops to quell disturbances in their dominions to facilitate the collection of tax.<sup>131</sup> And, as the Company began to expand its political and commercial activities across the subcontinent, royal women were not averse to deploying

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<sup>128</sup> For the begum's wealth and influence in eighteenth-century Lucknow, see Barnett, *North India between empires*, p. 102.

<sup>129</sup> Shums un-Nissa Begum to Minto, 13 Jan. 1808, In-letters 1808 Jan-June, Persian Correspondence, Minto Papers, MS 11574, NLS, p. 24-25.

<sup>130</sup> Ghosh, *Sex and the family in colonial India*, p. 16-17.

<sup>131</sup> John Baillie was described as being 'sedulously employed in effecting an arrangement for the commutation on fair and just principles of your Highness's [Shumsoo Nissa Begum's] jaggeer and Khassa for a regular payment of money,' Minto to Shumsoo Nissa Begum, 2 Jul. 1813, Out-letters 1813, Persian Correspondence, Minto Papers, MS 11594, NLS, p. 120.

these networks in support of their personal enterprises, particularly by soliciting exemption from customs duties.<sup>132</sup> Aside from their business concerns, royal women were also prime builders, particularly noted for the construction of mosques, tombs, and caravanserais which publicly expressed their piety and prestige, and contributed to the honour and good reputation of their family.<sup>133</sup> Bala Bai, daughter of Mahadji Sindhia, adoptive sister of Daulat Rao and a prominent lady in his zenana, used the channel of the Resident to acquire the aid of the Commissioners for the Ceded and Conquered Provinces in Farrukhabad for planting an avenue of trees, constructing a road, and digging several wells between Muttra and Bindrabeen (Hindu sites of worship) for the convenience of pilgrims and travellers. Bala Bai forwarded a plan of the proposed work, and asked the commissioners to provide her agents with letters of reference that would assist them in the collection of the requisite labourers and materials.<sup>134</sup> In so doing, she marshalled the local expertise of the Company's agents to help her in a project which would materially manifest her piety as well as her benevolence. Women who enjoyed such status and connections were endowed with the leverage necessary to use the Company to facilitate projects designed to augment their financial and cultural capital.

In addition to the allure of their status and connections, one powerful way in which women could enlist the Company in their cause was to use the idiom of kinship. Historically, this was a political tool regularly used by royal women; as exemplified by the important role of Yessooda Bai in the dramatic struggle for the throne of Poona, adoption was a symbolic act through which women could imbue men with their power and status.<sup>135</sup> In a colonial context, the same technique was applied to British officials. The Begum Mumtaz Mahal, as part of her project to have her son recognized as heir apparent, denominated the Resident Archibald Seton her son and invested him with a *khilat*. Despite his better judgement, the Resident agreed to proceed with the ceremony, yielding 'to the solicitations of the Begum who expressed an anxious desire that the investiture should take place on the auspicious occasion of the anniversary of his Britannic majesty's Birthday'. In the event, however, the *khilat* was presented by Mumtaz Mahal's favourite son. This conduced to the prince's prestige and

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<sup>132</sup> See for example N.B. Edmonstone to W.A. Brooke, 28 Aug. 1812, Letters received by the agent to the Governor-General at Benares, Benares Residency Records, basta no. 12, book no. 53, UPSAA, p. 220; Richard Strachey to W.A. Brooke, 17 Oct. 1812, *Ibid.*, p. 257; N.B. Edmonstone to W.A. Brooke, 12 Dec. 1812, *Ibid.*, p. 290.

<sup>133</sup> Gregory C. Kozlowski, 'Private lives and public piety: Women and the practice of Islam in Mughal India', in *Women in the medieval Islamic world: Power, patronage, and piety*, ed. Gavin R. Hambly (Houndmills, Basingstoke, 1998), p. 475-477.

<sup>134</sup> Richard Strachey to J.E. Colebrooke and John Deane, 31 Jul. 1812, Strachey Papers, Mss Eur D514/1, OIOC, p. 110-111.

<sup>135</sup> Guha, 'The family feud as a political resource', p. 77-78.

superior rank relative to his elder brothers, and was reported in the public newspapers as indicating that the Resident had been appointed 'naib wallee ahud' or Deputy heir apparent'.<sup>136</sup> By forging a link between the Resident and her son, even if only in appearance, Mumtaz Mahal further strengthened her son's claim in the eyes of the population.

Related to the discourse of kinship was one of protection, through which women symbolically appealed to Company agents as male guardians. Although women were often characterized as the main instigators and abettors of family conflict, they were also considered to be its chief victims, leading the Company to position themselves as protectors even in relation to women whom they otherwise condemned for their scheming.<sup>137</sup> At Delhi, Archibald Seton was convinced that 'the Mother of the Heir Apparent was at the bottom of all the Disturbances in the Palace,' while 'he himself [the heir apparent], tho' not the primary cause, took no pains to suppress them'.<sup>138</sup> At the same time, though Mumtaz Mehal was reproached for her ongoing campaign to secure Company recognition for her son Mirza Jahangir as heir apparent, the Resident was shocked to witness how Mirza Jahangir repaid his mother's indulgence with insult, and 'carried his excesses to such a height, as frequently to strike his Mother; which unnatural conduct, through the misplaced affection of His Majesty, was always suffered to go unpunished'.<sup>139</sup> The Resident's stance relative to royal women was thus powerfully shaped by conflicting ideas about gender and the family, intersecting with British assumptions of civilizational superiority which postulated that British men had a responsibility to protect Indian women from Indian men. In consequence, royal women figure prominently in the Residents' letters and papers in diametrically opposed roles, as victims as well as villains.

This attitude was particularly important in helping women to counterbalance the influence of male relatives. In part this pattern reflected the nature of the zenana itself; when a ruler died, his successor was expected to provide for the women of his predecessor's zenana. While rulers often venerated their own mothers and grandmothers, they were apt to resent the favourite wives of the fathers or brothers who had preceded them in power; these women, thrown upon the mercy of step-sons or brothers-in-law, sometimes paid a bitter price for the difficult relationships between male relatives. In such cases, particularly where a ruler was

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<sup>136</sup> Extract Political Letter from Bengal, 31 Jul. 1807, BC, IOR/F/4/237/5450, OIOC, p. 2-3.

<sup>137</sup> For instance, though Henry Russell condemned Jahan Parwar Begum as 'ignorant, selfish deceitful and intriguing', he at the same time observed that 'the nizam treats her with little or no consideration.' Henry Russell, 'The conditions and resources of the Nizam's government', Russell Papers, MS. Eng. misc. c. 324, Bodl. Oxf., p. 50.

<sup>138</sup> Archibald Seton to N.B. Edmonstone, 13 Jan. 1806, Foreign Secret Department Records, series no. 7 file no. 54, NAI, p. 8-9.

<sup>139</sup> Extract of Political Letter from Bengal, 19 Oct. 1809, BC, IOR/F/4/334/7657, OIOC, p. 1-2.

inimical to the English, it was not unusual for his female relatives to seek closer ties with the Company in pursuit of honours and financial benefits which were perhaps denied them by the ruler in question. In so doing, Indian women exploited a contemporary ideology which posited British men as the protectors of Indian womanhood.<sup>140</sup> For instance, Shums un-Nissa Begum, widow of the Nawab Asaf ud-Daula but subject to the authority of her brother-in-law Saadat Ali Khan, avowed that 'the Almighty is my witness that I have no kind friend nor protector but the faithful English Gentlemen'.<sup>141</sup> She called on the government to help her resolve disputes in her zemindaries and her bazaar, and to rectify the neglect and ill treatment which she believed herself to have been subject to from the Nawab Vizier.<sup>142</sup> Eventually, Shums un-Nissa even decided to retire to Company territories, to spend the rest of her life living under their protection. Though unwilling to take on the burden of looking after her or risk the Vizier's resentment, 'the Begums sufferings under the Viziers most discreditable persecution and enmity and under the pressure of a severe malady however were considered to be sufficient to over balance those motives'.<sup>143</sup>

By claiming the identity of 'the weaker vessel,' women had an argument for Company support which Residents and other officials found extremely difficult to gainsay. This sometimes put Company officials in a difficult position and seems to have effectually limited their sphere of action; to revert to the previous example, Company officials did not really want to provide asylum to Shums un-Nissa Begum, but felt compelled to do so in light of her complaints against the Vizier and her appeal to their protection. Similarly, after the rebellion of Vizier Ali, British officials sought, without success, to convince his wives to return to their family homes at Lucknow. The head wife Banu Begum expressed her unwillingness to leave Benares, justifying her decision with reference to the apparent coldness shown her by her father, a Lucknow courtier.<sup>144</sup> After the Resident's repeated attempts to ensure her return, the begum responded in dramatic terms. 'As I regard the English Gentlemen as my father & guardians, and they have resolved to abandon me, surely death is to be preferred to life', she is reported to have said. 'All I want is a single loaf of Bread and to live under the shadow of the Protection of the English.' When further pressed, she responded, 'why do you talk to a person who is completely in your power, do whatever you please, I will

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<sup>140</sup> Metcalf, *Ideologies of the Raj*, p. 94.

<sup>141</sup> Shum soon Nissa Begum to Minto, 13 Jan. 1808, In-letters 1808 Jan-June, Persian Correspondence, Minto Papers, MS 11574, NLS, p. 24-25.

<sup>142</sup> Shum soon Nissa Begum to Minto, 11 Oct. 1811, In-letters 1811 July-Dec, Persian Correspondence, Minto Papers, MS 11587, NLS, p. 112-113.

<sup>143</sup> Extract Political Letter from Bengal, 1 Mar. 1812, BC, IOR/F/4/394/10025, OIOC, p. 3;5. Extract Political Letter from Bengal, 1 May 1809, BC, IOR/F/4/308/7057, OIOC, p. 1.

<sup>144</sup> D. Vanderheyden to George Barlow, 18 May 1799, Letters issued by the agent to the Governor-General, Benares Residency Records, basta no. 1, book no. 4, UPSAA, p. 56.

not go to Lucknow to be disgraced [...] The English Gentlemen gave me honor, they ought to be the guardians of it.’<sup>145</sup> Here she used the unequal power dynamic as leverage, emphasizing her own powerlessness and, in so doing, placing responsibility for her fate in the Company’s hands.

Ultimately Banu Begum returned to Lucknow to visit her mother, who was ill; otherwise, nothing the Company did, including cutting off her stipend, succeeded in convincing her.<sup>146</sup> While deeply unwilling to use force against a woman of status, the Resident was beginning to consider employing violent methods, worried that her present condition of penury, ‘tho it is induced by her own disobedience of orders, may possibly, however erroneously, be ascribed to motives the very reverse of those which would govern your Lordship upon such occasions as the present.’<sup>147</sup> By holding her ground, Banu Begum had forced the Company to resort to unflattering methods, subverting their claims to civilizational superiority. Undoubtedly the Company would have prevailed against the Begum, if pressed, but it is telling that for many months the Begum was able to successfully fend off the attempts of the British to displace her, all the while claiming the moral high ground. In this context, basic similarities across the ‘gender frontier’ gave Indian women the tools to mobilize the British political elite in their interests.

## Conclusion

As this chapter has shown, the political Residents of the East India Company regularly found themselves immersed in the most intimate details of royal family life. The endeavour to consolidate control at Indian courts required the Residents to confront the complex and changeable form of Indian royal families, as well as the highly adaptable rules governing succession. This lack of definition could work to the Resident’s advantage, giving them the flexibility to throw their weight behind their chosen claimants while eliminating others, but then it could also be deployed by court factions and rebellious brothers and uncles for the same purpose. The indeterminacy of succession was what made relations between male relatives so antagonistic, much to the chagrin of the Residents largely responsible for arbitrating these disputes. Fraternal squabbles could be used to serve the Company’s interests, since brothers were motivated to supply the Company with information in return for protection against the resentments of the ruler. Still, this tactic had its risks, and Residents had to be discreet. Exile could be a useful means of getting troublesome relatives out of the way

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<sup>145</sup> Translation of the report of Ganesh Peshaud, munshi to the agent of the Governor-General at Benares, enclosure to *Ibid.*, p. 88-89.

<sup>146</sup> D. Vanderheyden to William Kirkpatrick, 1 May 1800, *Ibid.*, p. 178.

<sup>147</sup> D. Vanderheyden to Marquess Wellesley, 20 Sept. 1799, *Ibid.*, p. 119.

as well as potentially cultivating more amenable heirs to the throne who could be deployed further down the line, but royal exiles represented a considerable drain on time and resources.

Women were not only often active participants in the schemes of their male relatives, they were in many cases recognized to be the brains behind the operations. Residents resented the way these women exercised influence from the seclusion of the *zenana*, a space which allowed them intimate access to the ear of the ruler as well as ideally positioning them at a key node in the Indian information network. These advantages, in addition to their sometimes sizeable financial resources, enabled royal women to act as important political patrons, belying the belittling terms in which Residents usually alluded to them. The Residents' occasional condescension, however, did not mean that they dismissed royal women outright. In accordance with British ideas about the role of women in politics, Indian women were particularly valued for their moderating influence and their ability to smooth rivalrous relations between relatives.

Even when the Resident did not particularly seek the support of royal women, he recognized the danger of appearing to ignore or disrespect them. Royal women used their status and prestige to call on the support of the Resident in fulfilment of personal projects. Women further strengthened their claims on the Resident's services through the idiom of kinship and protection. This language was used to invoke the Company as a counterbalance to hostile male relatives. In so doing, women often placed a moral imperative on Company officials, demanding that they support the weak and powerless; because of this moralising discourse, the Company sometimes found themselves implicated in family dramas against their will, given their desire to appear in the guise of protectors of Indian womanhood. Although women sometimes affiliated themselves with the Company in this way, occasionally to the Company's material advantage, this pattern should not be taken to suggest that these women were somehow collaborators. Rather, women, along with sons and brothers, merely took the opportunities available to them to defend their own interests in a context of courtly intrigue where their life and well-being was often at stake.

Although the Company could thus benefit from the vulnerable position of relatives, their control over the situation was still far from absolute. In this respect the Resident's relationship with the ruling elite paralleled his relationship with his *munshis*; the assistance of royal family members was often necessary to the successful operations of the Residency, but it was not regarded as reliable. The very social and cultural capital which rendered these men and women valuable also made them threatening. As the preceding two chapters have tried to demonstrate, this was a core paradox at the heart of the Company's developing system of imperial influence. The very notion of indirect rule required the imperial power to be able to

place their trust in a competent and capable body of administrators and elites, but by shoring up their authority there was always the possibility that these local powers were being invested with precisely the tools necessary to resist and undermine the imperial project.



## Conclusion

The Shrimant, brought up in the delicacies of the palace,  
 Is now roaming through forests;  
 Under the blazing sun he seeks his path through thorns and brambles;  
 He tends and tethers his own horse;  
 He spreads his thin scarf on rough ground and uses it as a bed during the night.  
 He eats his rice from a wooden bowl one day before sunset, another day late after midnight;  
 At every stage his favourite servants drop out;  
 Never, oh never, has such a fate fallen on any of Balaji Vishvanath's house;  
 Elephants, horses, camels, treasure all are being left behind;  
 What a fate has Bajirao to bear now in life;  
 As he journeys on, he addresses to each with tears in his eyes, the words:  
 'This is our last visit, be kind, and meet us if you live.'<sup>1</sup>

This Marathi ballad evocatively captures the flight of Peshwa Baji Rao II following his defeat at the hands of the British East India Company in 1817. Driven from his capital, separated from his allies, he roamed from place to place, eluding the tireless pursuit of the Company's armed forces. Over time, the number of his followers thinned, encouraged perhaps by the proclamation issued by Mountstuart Elphinstone on 11 February which promised that those who deserted Baji Rao's cause would be allowed to return home unmolested, while the properties and rights of those who continued to support him would be forfeit. Finally, on 3 June, after a brief negotiation, Baji Rao surrendered. Accompanied by an armed retinue, he proceeded to Bithur, a holy site near Cawnpore where he lived out the remainder of his days on a Company pension, his activities closely supervised by a Company commissioner. Though Baji Rao showed some signs of aspiring to restoration, an ambition greedily taken advantage of by the Company officials eventually convicted for extorting money from him, the former Peshwa would never again act on the political stage.<sup>2</sup> The symbolic leader of the Marathas, one of the final major obstacles to the Company's expansion in the subcontinent, had been decisively suppressed.

Baji Rao, along with the other men and women who figure in this dissertation – Residents, *munshis*, kings, concubines - witnessed important changes in his lifetime. In the year 1798, the East India Company was still just one regional power among many (albeit a dominant one), its territories relatively limited, its Residents functioning like diplomatic representatives. The Court of Directors and Board of Control in London had clearly expressed their aversion to schemes of conquest and their desire to avoid political entanglements in India, emphasizing above all the Company's commercial origins and function. To the extent that Residents engaged with Indian politics, therefore, it was largely to exclude European powers and military expertise from Indian courts, with the aim of maintaining the status quo

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<sup>1</sup> G.S. Sardesai, *The new history of the Marathas*, 3 vols. (Bombay, 1968), vol. III, p. 496.

<sup>2</sup> Pratul C. Gupta, *Baji Rao II and the East India Company, 1796-1818* (Oxford, p. 1939), p. 202-203.

in the subcontinent. Residents negotiated loans, subsidies, and war reparations, and carefully oversaw royal successions, but their intervention in Indian administrations was generally limited; in the Maratha states, Residents exercised very little control at all, and maintained only uneasy diplomatic relations interspersed with periods of war. By 1818, however, the scene had changed significantly. The Company had concluded key subsidiary treaties which brought previously recalcitrant Indian rulers under their influence, most notably Sindhia and the Rajah of Berar. In Awadh, the Company had annexed extensive tracts of territory and, despite the promises made in the treaty of 1801, continued to exercise significant influence over the nominally independent king. Most dramatically, the Company took direct control over considerable portions of central India which had previously belonged to the Peshwa. By the end of the period under study, British military and political pre-eminence in India was conclusively established, and the Company enjoyed direct or indirect control over most of the subcontinent.

Amid these transformations, the Residents developed strategies to build their credit within the Company and to cement their influence at Indian courts. Not only did Residents endeavour to control the public image of the Company at royal capitals by closely monitoring the flow of letters and rumours, they also used their position as the exclusive channel of communication with the Governor-General to cast their activities in a flattering light and to consolidate their credibility in Calcutta at the expense of the rulers to whom they were attached. Recognizing the power of coercive measures, Residents also asserted their rights to employ force or the threat of force, and justified this stance in their letters to Calcutta by portraying the Indian kingdoms in which they were stationed as lawless zones of perpetual warfare. Residents surrounded themselves with material finery which reinforced their status at court, as well as exchanging lavish presents which established relations of obligation with the ruler and his ministers at the same time as they concealed the growing asymmetry of the subsidiary alliance system with a veneer of reciprocity. Finally, and perhaps most importantly, Residents sought with varying degrees of success to harness the influence and expertise of munshis and royal family members to their cause.

Yet, as this dissertation has demonstrated, the establishment and consolidation of the Resident's influence at these major Indian courts was far from smooth or straightforward. To the contrary, the changing nature of the Residency system was a major source of conflict, even within the Company itself. Lacking clear precedents, the Residents and their superiors in London and Calcutta debated how the Company's influence over Indian courts should be exercised, and what it should look like. To what extent should Residents embrace the use of exemplary violence, supposedly such a vital aspect of Indian sovereignty? Should Residents engage in the same acts of pageantry and benevolence as the rulers whose authority they were

increasingly seeking to supplant? The controversies surrounding these questions reveal conflicting visions about the basis and legitimacy of Company power in the subcontinent, namely, whether the Company should present themselves as successors to the Mughals, or whether it was in fact their civilizational superiority, as Europeans, which undergirded their right to rule. Thanks to the work of historians like Robert Travers and Thomas Metcalf, it is well known that the eighteenth and early nineteenth century Company was shaken by these ideological sea changes; this thesis, however, has shown how these questions manifested themselves in the routine business of empire.<sup>3</sup> Uncertainty about the Company's role in India was not simply an abstract concern; it permeated every aspect of the Resident's day-to-day life, including the clothes they wore, the house they lived in, whether they flogged criminals or shot them from a cannon. The recurring controversies within the political line were in large part a reflection of this underlying irresolution.

Even where Company policy was clear, translating these policies into practice could prove problematic. For instance, though the Residents were instructed to exchange political gifts according to a strict principle of reciprocity, in practice this principle proved difficult to enforce given that Residents could neither anticipate or control the presents they were given in return. Similarly, though the members of the political line were chosen for their fluency in Indian languages, to most Residents it quickly became apparent that knowing the language was hardly sufficient for them to be able to act independently on the political stage, given the many different rules and considerations which framed Indian courtly politics. This gap between ideals and reality produced recurring tensions between the Governor-General-in-Council, who issued the instructions, and the Resident, who was responsible for making them happen.

These disputes are equally revealing of the issues connected with a rapidly expanding empire. As the Company's sphere of control encompassed ever greater expanses of territory, officials in Calcutta as well as in London were faced with the problem of how to ensure the good conduct of the men who acted in their name at distant imperial outposts. The Company's inability to closely supervise its own agents produced anxieties about what these young men might be getting up to, an uneasiness which the ever-increasing stream of official reports from Indian capitals could never quite allay; after all, administrators in Company centres were keenly aware of the powers of representation which Residents in distant courts enjoyed and their ability to whitewash their misdeeds in carefully worded letters, as Chapter 1 has shown. Suspicions centred around the question of where the Resident's loyalties lay: were his British virtues intact, or had he become 'Indianized,' his habits, dispositions and

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<sup>3</sup> Travers, *Ideology and empire*, p. 207; Metcalf, *Ideologies of the Raj*, p. 28.

attachments shaped by his long sojourn at Indian courts? The very feature which has made the Residents so attractive in the eyes of modern historians like William Dalrymple or Maya Jasanoff was thus precisely the aspect of their work which most concerned some of their contemporaries, that is, their embeddedness in Indian political life.<sup>4</sup>

More troubling even than the issue of ‘Indianization’ was the question of whether the Residents were motivated by public benefits, or personal gains. Although there was a developing discourse of transparency and merit in Britain in the early nineteenth century, public and private interests had long been intertwined and in practise proved difficult to disentangle. Building on the work of historians of nineteenth-century British politics, this thesis has examined how broader concerns about governance and public accountability acquired particular urgency in a context of indirect rule.<sup>5</sup> Here, the vicissitudes of distance and the representative function of the Residents made the boundaries between public and private particularly difficult to demarcate. Because the actions of the Resident were perceived to reflect on the Company as a whole, the intermingling of the personal and the public was a prominent feature of the Residency system, as every aspect of the Residents’ activities and lifestyle was subject to Company scrutiny, from his expense claims to his patronage of Indian scribes.

These concerns relating to the dissolving boundaries between public and private, Briton and Indian, both came particularly to the fore in contemporary anxieties surrounding the munshi, the subject of Chapter 4. From the perspective of men in London and Calcutta, the Residents were in danger of becoming entangled in relations of dependency with Indians which not only threatened to tarnish their image of superiority but also to impede their ability to act independently. Worryingly, the obligations entailed by these relationships had the potential to outweigh the primary duty which the Resident owed to the Company; there was even a possibility that the Company’s resources and authority would be misused to fulfil these private obligations. From the Resident’s perspective, too, an intimate connection with one’s munshi could prove risky, investing the munshi with influence which he might use to pursue his own agenda at the expense of the Resident’s authority and credibility at court. At the same time, Residents were reliant on munshis to compose and interpret letters, to negotiate elaborate courtly ceremonial, and to help broker deals. The munshi had in his possession crucial knowledge, experience, and connections which the Residency, if it was to operate successfully, could not do without. For the same reason, Residents worked hard to cultivate

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<sup>4</sup> Jasanoff, *Edge of empire*, p. 9; a similar sentiment is expressed in Dalrymple, *White Mughals*, p. xlix.

<sup>5</sup> Harling and Mandler, ‘From “fiscal-military” state to laissez-faire state’, p. 54-55; Hilton, *A mad, bad, and dangerous people*, p. 120-124; Harling, *The waning of Old Corruption*, p. 22; Jupp, ‘The landed elite and political authority in Britain’, p. 64.

relationships with royal family members who could provide vital support to the Resident's projects through the application of influence and the provision of political intelligence, as Chapter 5 has shown. While Residents were often dubious of the motives of their courtly allies, they had little option but to trust them, given their own position as an outsider and their concomitant lack of social and cultural capital.

Because of their influence and cultural competence, Indian political actors therefore had the leverage necessary to make the Residency system work for them, to some extent. Company networks were used to make claims to property, secure jobs, expedite building projects, and serve a variety of other purposes conducive to the social, cultural, and economic capital of the individuals concerned. The Resident could be a valuable counterpoint to rival factions at court, protecting administrators from the disfavour of the ruler; he could also shield brothers and cousins from the resentments of the ruler, and side with royal women against the interventions of male relatives. Previous studies of the Residencies have tended to present a rather romantic portrait of cross-cultural engagement by focusing on emotional attachments (friendships, marriages), or else have devoted their attention to ritual encounters circumscribed in space and time.<sup>6</sup> This thesis has sought instead to bring to light the quotidian substance of the confrontation between British Residents and the Indian court, the stream of letters, petitions, gifts, and services which made up Anglo-Indian exchange and formed the bedrock of the Company's developing system of imperial influence.

These interactions were facilitated by broad similarities between British and Indian political and family culture. Britain and India were clearly distinct in the early nineteenth century, and there were certainly prominent differences which led the Residents to take a negative view of Indian society; for instance, a conflict in military cultures spawned accusations of tyrannical and inhuman behaviour, while the fraternal conflicts characteristic of Indian royal families were sharply censured given the importance of family solidarity to social, political, and economic advancement in Britain. At the same time, social and political life in both places was still structured in ways that were not starkly different, and which therefore provided a common ground on which British and Indian political actors could cooperate. Both the British Residents and their Indian munshis, for instance, would have had roughly similar expectations of the benefits and obligations entailed by their patron-client relationships, given that these vertical relationships of dependency were the basic fabric of which both societies were composed. Similarly, while British and Indian family structures differed in many respects, common assumptions about kinship and gender gave Indian royal women the tools to form alliances and mobilize the Residents in their interests through the

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<sup>6</sup> For relationships of intimacy, see Dalrymple, *White Mughals* and Durba Gosh, *Sex and the family in colonial India*; for ceremonial, see special issue on 'Civil ritual in India', *MAS*, 24:3 (1990).

imposition of compelling moral imperatives of protection and guardianship. By examining the Resident's day-to-day work, other commonalities also emerge, suggesting why Residents could cement their position at Indian courts so quickly. Many features of Indian courtly life would have resonated with the Residents, who came from a society which similarly emphasized the intermingling of the social and the material in the form of gift-giving and grandeur, and which also had a sophisticated epistolary culture where readers and writers attended carefully to language and format.

While the Residencies were thus prominent sites of cooperation between British officials and Indian administrators and elites, they also inspired opposition. British letters were forged, stolen, or waylaid; misinformation was industriously spread. Princes and ministers organized violent uprisings, while rebels and marauders plundered in the Company's domains. These acts of overt resistance might on the surface seem radically different from the practical support provided by the Resident's Indian allies, who we might be tempted to label as collaborators; this dissertation, however, has tried to upset these binaries. Life at Indian courts was complicated and occasionally cut-throat; to the extent that munshis, ministers, or royal women assisted the Resident, it was usually in pursuit of their own objectives, and sometimes even for fear of their life. The Resident was only one player in a diverse field of interests and factions, and it was these configurations of power which usually determined the activities of the Indian political actors described in this thesis, from ministers and queen mothers to informants and intelligencers of lowly origins. To draw too sharp a line between the Company's allies and adversaries is also reductive because many people acted in both capacities, most famously the Bahu Begum who went from being the Company's most committed enemy to their most devoted supporter, as discussed in Chapter 5. Loyalties were rarely set in stone, and individuals who had previously shown an unwillingness to work with the Resident were apt to change tactics if the stakes were high enough, while those who had previously supported the Company could and did revolt if the opportunity presented itself. All this is to say that the Resident was reliant on people whose commitments, and consequently the assistance which they provided, were often partial and contingent.

Although the Company had achieved relative paramountcy by 1818, making it a logical stopping-point for this dissertation, 1818 is still by no means the end of this process of negotiation and resistance. The final Maratha War certainly transformed the political landscape, but many of the Indian kingdoms described in this study nevertheless lingered on. The Rajah of Nagpur Appah Sahib may have fled into exile following the 1817-18 war, but unlike the Peshwa he was succeeded by a nephew whose successors retained control over Nagpur until the kingdom was annexed per the Doctrine of Lapse in 1854. Awadh would

likewise remain independent until it was annexed for maladministration in 1856. Meanwhile, given his non-intervention in the conflict of 1817-18, Sindhia retained relative independence for some time, even mounting a violent resistance to Company encroachment in 1843. Thereafter Sindhia was militarily reduced, but Gwalior, like Hyderabad, remained ostensibly independent until 1947. For these kingdoms, the confrontation with the Company continued, albeit under different conditions and in different forms. The Company's so-called 'paramountcy' remained uneven and ill-defined, leaving room for rulers and ministers to negotiate the terms of that relationship, for instance by blocking the development of roads and postal routes which would have integrated the princely states more thoroughly into British India.

This thesis has focused on events at royal capitals, but, looking away from the court, towards the forests and hill-tracts, also suggests a different, longer time-line. While the Company might have successfully installed themselves in urban political centres, power in eighteenth-century India consisted, as scholars like Farhat Hasan and Stewart Gordon have shown, of relationships; of a shifting, negotiated sharing of sovereignty between rulers and local power-holders.<sup>7</sup> Establishing control over these armed lineages was a longer process, particularly where the terrain was inhospitable. Though the communities inhabiting the forests and mountain passes had occasionally proven useful allies in rounding up resistant rulers and nobles, they also represented a threat to stability in the region. While the Company initially concluded treaties with groups like the Bhils and the Gonds, recognizing the independence of their 'little kings' as a means of controlling otherwise inaccessible territory by proxy, these groups ultimately proved resistant to the rules laid down for them by the British. Their continuing raids of nearby lowland villages provoked Company attempts to pacify and settle them, which in turn incited open revolt. Though firmly ensconced in large capitals, the Company's grasp over the countryside, particularly 'zones of anomaly' which they perceived as 'wild,' remained tenuous.<sup>8</sup> The intertwined processes of pacification, settlement, and deforestation intended to subdue unruly populations would continue into the twentieth century.<sup>9</sup>

The findings of this dissertation could therefore be enriched by a more detailed analysis of events in the countryside. Although the Residents' activities were mostly restricted to the royal court, the development of the subsidiary alliance system had

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<sup>7</sup> Farhat Hasan, *State and locality in Mughal India: Power relations in Western India, c. 1572-1730* (Cambridge, 2004), p. 126-127; Stewart Gordon, *The Marathas 1600-1818* (Cambridge, 1993), p. 179.

<sup>8</sup> K. Sivaramakrishnan, *Modern forests: Statemaking and environmental change in colonial Eastern India* (Stanford, CA, 1999), p. 34-35.

<sup>9</sup> Sumit Guha, *Environment and ethnicity in India, 1200-1991* (Cambridge, 1999), p. 200.

ramifications beyond the city limits. Outside the capitals, the story was less one of negotiation and political intrigue than it was of flight and famine in the wake of pillaging and warfare.<sup>10</sup> For the general population, the traditional strategies for combatting this kind of deprivation were migration and marauding. These activities had repercussions for the ill-defined and shifting borders between princely states and British-administered country, producing recurring disputes over law, order, and extraterritoriality which in turn suggest a great deal about changing ideas about sovereignty and interstate relations. The movement of people required Company officials and their Indian counterparts to clarify their relationship to one another and their obligations to their subjects; indeed, it required them to theorise about how the idea of subjecthood itself should be defined. Future work on the princely states might therefore fruitfully focus on the borders. This approach would foreground the agency of the broader population, showing how practices in the peripheries informed diplomatic activities at the capital, where courtiers and colonial officials found themselves debating the legal status of peasants, mercenaries, and merchants.

Although there remains much more to be said about the relations between Indian kingdoms and the Company, by focusing on activities at court and the dynamics between Residents and the ruling administrations this thesis has nevertheless tracked a crucial shift: the emergence of a doctrine of paramountcy. Assumptions about the Company's right to intervene in and even control Indian politics gathered force during this period, with the disturbances of 1817 and 1818 acting (from a British perspective) as a powerful confirmation of what the Residents had long begun to suspect, namely, that the neighbouring Indian kingdoms would never make trustworthy allies. The Company's influence would have to be imposed if their objectives in the subcontinent were to be achieved. The Resident at Nagpur described the events of 1817-1818 as 'a violation of every principle on which faith between nations or Individuals is founded', concluding that 'all confidence hereafter in any thing but a system of the strictest control is out of the question.'<sup>11</sup>

The impact of the Peshwa of Poona Baji Rao's decision to rebel against the Company was especially profound. Baji Rao had been indebted to the Company for his place on the throne, and had consequently been considered a malleable instrument in the hands of the Residents.<sup>12</sup> Though not totally blind to his resentment of Company encroachment, from the perspective of British administrators the Peshwa had seemed to exemplify the potential utility

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<sup>10</sup> John Macdonald Kinneir to J.A. Graham, 18 Feb. 1806, Sir John Macdonald Kinneir Papers, Mss Eur D1086, OIOC, np; Henry Russell to Henry Russell Sr., 4 Mar. 1811, Russell Papers, MS. Eng. lett. c. 151, Bodl. Oxf., p. 9; Henry Russell to Henry Russell Sr., 3 Apr. 1811, Russell Papers, MS. Eng. lett. c. 151, Bodl. Oxf., p. 20.

<sup>11</sup> Richard Jenkins to Marquess Hastings, 7 Dec. 1817, Mss Eur F311/10, OIOC, p. 34.

<sup>12</sup> Memorandum of Colonel Barry Close, Minto Papers, MS 11323, NLS, p. 33.



of the subsidiary alliance system. The Peshwa of Poona tended to be presented as the model of how an allied ruler might behave, and what his relationship with the Resident might be. In 1815, assessing the state of the political landscape in India, Colebrooke declared ‘the court of Poona is a very satisfactory instance that a perfectly good understanding is to be maintained even in very delicate circumstances, when the turn and character of the Resident are suited to his station; and the native sovereign is not indisposed to the alliance, and his temper not entirely impracticable.’<sup>13</sup> These perceptions of the Peshwa as the ideal monarch are what made his eventual resistance to the Company’s regime so shocking.

Indeed, Henry Russell had retained such a good impression of the Peshwa’s character after his brief time as Acting Resident at Poona that even after the events of 1818 he couldn’t shake the idea that ultimately it was the Resident Mountstuart Elphinstone’s ‘austere and irritating’ conduct that drove Bajji Rao to rebel.<sup>14</sup> Even after 1818, then, British contemporaries were still apt to wonder, ‘what if?’ What if things had been done differently? This thesis has sought to recapture these feelings of uncertainty and equivocation, along with other emotions (fear, frustration, suspicion, anger) which feature so prominently in the Residents’ surviving papers. The Residents’ testimony reminds us that, though in retrospect the nineteenth century would seem to be one long march towards the empire on which the sun never set, the reality, as it was experienced on the ground, was less straightforward. For the Residents, at least, Britain’s expanding imperial influence was instead made up of a series of messy and protracted practical experiments, based on many competing visions of what relationships with non-European polities could, or should, be.

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<sup>13</sup> Report appended to H.T. Colebrooke to Marquess of Hastings, 15 Oct. 1814, Cleveland Public Library Papers, IOR Neg 4226, wq091.92 Ea77p5, OIOC, p. 22-23.

<sup>14</sup> Henry Russell to his father, 7 Jun. 1817, Russell Papers, MS. Eng. lett. c. 151, Bodl. Oxf., p. 188. See also Henry Russell to his father, 22 Aug. 1818, *Ibid.*, p. 241.

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